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ABSTRACT

This guide explains the essential elements of high-quality reading programs and provides suggestions for raising reading achievement in the elementary and middle grades. It is designed to promote the development of the principal as an instructional leader and focuses on the principal's role in the implementation of an effective reading program. Sections are titled as follows: (1) Issues in Reading Instruction Today; (2) Setting the Stage: Putting in Place the Essential Elements of a High-Quality Reading Program; (3) What Does Good Reading Instruction Look Like at the Classroom Level?; (4) Using Assessment Data to Inform Reading Instruction; (5) Providing Extra Support for Struggling Readers; (6) Observing and Evaluating Reading Instruction: The Principal's Role; (7) Educating and Supporting Teachers; (8) Working with Families; and (9) Moving Ahead with Your School's Efforts to Improve Reading Instruction. The guide also contains 93 references and 5 appendices: Suggested Books for Children; Teacher Observation Form; Evaluating Your Reading Program; Handouts for Parents; and Glossary of Terms Related to Reading Instruction. In addition, the guide contains forms, lists, checklists, and space to write notes, reminders, and ideas. (WFA)

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What Principals Need to Know About Teaching

Reading

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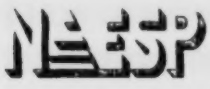

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Foreword

Although principals are expected to be instructional leaders within their school buildings, many principals do not possess expertise in every instructional area. To address this situation and provide the information principals need to be effective instructional leaders, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and Educational Research Service (ERS) have made a commitment to produce a series of research-based guides called *What Principals Need to Know About....*

Aimed at the busy working principal, the series will focus on instructional issues of vital importance to effective leadership. Each publication in this series will address a major subject area and provide research-based information and helpful "how-to" tips in an easy-to-use format. This publication, *What Principals Need to Know About Teaching... Reading*, is the first in the series.

School accountability and the pressure to raise achievement scores across all grade levels is higher than ever before. Given this pressure, principals must know what effective instruction looks like in all subject areas. They also must be able to share with teachers their knowledge of the various strategies that can be used to improve student achievement. In many cases, they also need to have an understanding of how a particular skill, such as reading or mathematics reasoning, develops.

Each *What Principals Need to Know About...* publication will be research-based, but will also contain advice from practitioners in the relevant field and examples of how this advice is applied by school leaders. Each guide also will include step-by-step suggestions for following the expert advice, reproducible checklists and forms, and both print and online sources of further information.

NAESP and ERS believe that these guides will help to close the divide between research and practice. We are excited about the prospects for the *What Principals Need to Know About...* series, and we look forward to receiving your accounts of how you put this series to work for you.

Vincent L. Ferrandino
Executive Director
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Elementary School Principals

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About this Guide

This publication, *What Principals Need to Know About Teaching...Reading,* explains the essential elements of high-quality reading programs and provides suggestions for raising reading achievement in the elementary and middle grades. Both the content and the format have been designed to create a practical, easy-to-use guide that principals can use on a continuing basis. In addition to a comprehensive discussion of the important issues, it includes:

- forms and other materials to copy and use as you evaluate your reading program and collaborate with teachers and parents;
- lists of questions to consider as you develop a plan to raise reading achievement; and
- space for you to write notes, reminders, and ideas.

Our goal for the *What Every Principal Needs to Know About...* series is to create curricular resources to which principals can refer for concise, research-based information on the major subject areas in K-8 instruction. These guides are designed to promote the development of the principal as an instructional leader. We hope that you will find this guide useful and that you will add value to it by recording your notes and observations in the provided space as you refine your own reading programs.

We begin this *What Principals Need to Know About Teaching...Reading* guide with an overview of the general issues in reading education and a discussion of the essential elements of high-quality reading programs. From here, we move on to topics such as how reading should be taught, using assessment data to inform instruction, and approaches for working with struggling readers.

Finally, we outline strategies for collaborating with teachers and parents, improving teachers' skills in delivering reading instruction, and conducting effective observations of reading lessons. Throughout each section of this guide, the focus remains on the role of the principal in coordinating the successful implementation of an effective reading program.

Section 1
Issues in Reading Instruction Today

As the Learning First Alliance said in its recent action paper, "Every educator, parent, and child knows that reading is the most important skill taught in elementary school" (1998, 52). Therefore, it is essential that all children receive the best possible reading instruction to set them on the road to academic success.

But what is the most effective method for teaching children to read, and how can school leaders ensure the implementation of high-quality reading programs? Researchers, school administrators, teachers, and parents have all discussed and debated this question, often reaching no conclusive decision.

Five Simple-to-Follow Strategies for Raising Reading Achievement

- Focus on changing what you can change.
- Teach the students who can't read how to read.
- Teach every student how to read to learn.
- Motivate all students to read more books, to read increasingly more challenging books, and to be accountable for what they read.
- Create a reading culture in your school.

Source: McEwan 2001.

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Over the past 30 years, whole language and phonics have each taken their turn as the predominant instructional method used by teachers and schools. The argument over which method works best became so intense that it became known within the profession as the "reading wars" (Lemann 1997). Most researchers and practitioners now agree that a combination of both approaches, or a "balanced" approach, is best. But consensus about the most effective mix of skills-based versus whole-language instructional strategies still eludes us.

Early literacy assessment practices are also a hot topic, as educators increasingly understand the importance of identifying students having difficulty before they fall too far behind. However, many classroom teachers have had little training in designing and using informal assessments, or in analyzing data provided by instruments such as standardized tests.

And finally, increasing attention is being given to the number of upper elementary and middle school students experiencing difficulty not only with comprehension and retention of material, but also with decoding simple words. School leaders must wrestle with the logistics of how to efficiently and effectively help these students.

Questions and concerns about how to develop an effective reading program are not new. Today, however, educators have an increased awareness of the barriers that reading difficulties pose to student learning, and a better sense of the complexities surrounding literacy development and instruction.

On the positive side, both research and practice are helping to identify ways to teach reading and to help struggling readers. It takes a skilled teacher to diagnose the needs of each student, to plan and implement an effective and motivating instructional strategy, and to provide remediation in necessary areas. As the school principal, you play a key role in orchestrating the successful organization of these elements of effective reading programs.

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 2
Setting the Stage: Putting in Place the Essential Elements of a High-Quality Reading Program

Research has demonstrated that an effective K-8 reading program can increase the achievement level of all students. Since teachers, researchers, and the general public agree that learning to read—and read well—is key to our students' ability to participate effectively in education from the elementary through the high school levels, schools and districts across the country are evaluating and sometimes redesigning their reading programs.

A review of the research reveals several characteristics of a high-quality school or district reading program:

1. an understanding that literacy instruction should be embedded across the curriculum and aligned across grade levels;
2. a "balanced" literacy approach for early-grades reading instruction, which includes both skills-based and whole language instruction depending on student needs;
3. ongoing assessment to ensure that no students fall too far behind;
4. additional help provided for students who need it; and
5. staff development and support provided for teachers and principals.

As the school instructional leader, the principal is responsible for organizing and overseeing the effective implementation of the above characteristics common to high-quality reading programs. These characteristics are explained briefly below and will be elaborated upon more fully in the next few chapters. A questionnaire to assist you in evaluating your reading program can be found in Appendix C.

Developing a High-Quality Reading Program: Critical Questions to Guide Conversations Among School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents

Determining a set "recipe" for good reading instruction in all schools is not possible, given the varying characteristics of students, classroom settings, student learning styles, available materials, and preferred teaching styles. The following questions are designed to engage school leaders, teachers, and parents in meaningful conversation about your specific school's orientation towards reading and goals for reading achievement. Try to answer these questions as specifically as possible.

1. How should we teach beginning reading?
2. What kind of instruction do students need once they have learned to read?
   - ▹ What kinds of materials should they be reading?
   - ▹ How much time should they spend in reading instruction and recreational reading?
   - ▹ How should parents be expected to contribute to the reading program?
   - ▹ How important are skills and strategies in reading instruction?
   - ▹ Which skills and strategies should be taught and when?
3. Are philosophy, instruction, and curricula cohesive and articulated through all of the grades and by all of the teachers in the school?
4. What kinds of students make up the school population?
   - ▹ Do we have a majority of at-risk students, or do most of our students arrive at school with reading readiness skills firmly in place?
   - ▹ What do parents expect from our school with regard to teaching the children?
5. Who are the school's teachers?
   - ▹ Are they experienced veterans, or recent graduates?
   - ▹ Are they innovators eager to try everything new, or more conservative, show-me types?

Source: Elaine K. McEwan. 1998. *The Principal's Guide to Raising Reading Achievement.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p. 29.

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Embedding Literacy Instruction across the Curriculum and across Grade Levels

Reading instruction is typically thought to be the responsibility of primary grades teachers, language arts teachers in the upper elementary and middle grades, and reading specialists. However, by considering all teachers "teachers of reading," schools can substantially increase the amount of time available for students to learn and practice reading-related skills in the context of other instruction.

For example, any teacher can model good reading strategies as he or she introduces texts, storybooks, or other written documents in his/her classes. When teaching social studies, an elementary teacher might do a shared reading activity using a "big book" on immigrants in the United States. A middle school math teacher might ask his students for definitions of key terms and interpretations of important phrases in word problems. In the area of science, a teacher might teach her students strategies for reading and comprehending text, such as previewing a section before reading and using graphic organizers to show major concepts. Thus, a good district or school reading program communicates the understanding to all teachers that literacy instruction should be embedded across the curriculum and provides them with training on how to do this.

Another key element of a high-quality reading program is the alignment of reading instruction across the grades. The instructional framework for reading, including the curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments, must be coordinated among teachers within a grade level, and the curriculum and assessments must proceed in a logical sequence from one grade level to the next while offering a progression of increasingly complex subject matter (Newmann et al. 2001).

As part of a well-aligned reading curriculum, literacy instruction actually extends through the high school level, building on previous skills taught and responding to the growing complexity of texts read. By involving teachers across the grade levels in discussions of what students should learn—and when—teachers gain a better understanding of what effective "teaching of reading" looks like at all grade levels and of its importance to student learning.

With these two understandings in mind—that reading instruction should be embedded in the curriculum, and that the curriculum should be aligned across all grade levels—we can now look briefly at the other critical issues involved in developing a high-quality school or district reading program.

A Balanced Approach for Early Reading Instruction

Naturally, high-quality instruction is vital to an effective early-grades reading program. Given this, every child deserves an excellent reading teacher who encourages

independent learning, has high achievement expectations, provides assistance when needed, and is conversant in the latest reading research findings. However, although everyone agrees on the need for effective literacy instruction, educators, parents, and researchers often disagree on the specifics of how to teach young children to read.

In contrast to the widespread acceptance of whole language philosophies that dominated reading research and instruction for more than a decade, researchers are now beginning to find evidence that supports the need of some children for "systematic, synthetic phonics in which children are taught sound-symbol correspondences singly, directly, and explicitly" (Moats 2000). Phonemic awareness programs are gaining attention as educators work to find ways to draw children's attention to the individual letter sounds that comprise words.

Although reading research points to the necessity of developing phonemic awareness skills in children, it also suggests that phonemic awareness instruction alone does not produce good readers. Lyon states:

> In reading education, teachers are frequently presented with a "one size fits all" philosophy that emphasizes either a "whole language" or "phonics" orientation to instruction. No doubt, this parochial type of preparation places many children at continued risk for reading failure since it is well established that no reading program should be without all the major components of reading instruction (phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, fluency, and reading comprehension) (1997).

There is also support in the research for the importance of two additional components of reading instruction:

- Having students begin by writing letters, then parts of words, then words and sentences.
- Providing extensive time for reading, both with support from the teacher and independently (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998).

Most schools currently offer reading instruction designed to meet guidelines or program descriptions developed by their state department of education and/or their district. While these guidelines are designed to be balanced, they still vary in the degree of emphasis placed on different instructional elements. In reality, few dispute the fact that good teachers have been using a combination of methods to teach children to read all along (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998). In fact, the more strategies a teacher knows and uses to address students' different strengths, weaknesses, and reading styles, the better prepared the teacher is to accurately perceive his or her students' needs and help them to learn before reading problems develop (Education Commission of the States 1998). In recognition of this, many schools and teachers are adopting "balanced literacy models," which incorporate aspects of both phonics and whole language instruction.

Even with this latitude, it is important that individual teachers use their own professional judgment about the balance needed in the classroom every day. As Denton writes:

> The term "balanced" is often used to describe reading instruction that incorporates the strengths of both phonics and whole language. There is no single combination of instructional techniques that works best for every child in every classroom. Instead, balance requires teachers to choose from numerous instructional strategies to provide a balance that is appropriate for each child (1999, 1).

Early and Continuous Literacy Assessment

Every effort should be made to ensure that children's reading problems are recognized and addressed early, before the "critical period" for learning to read passes and reading problems begin to interfere with the acquisition of content knowledge. A statement by the Learning First Alliance suggests that "frequent assessment of developing readers, and the use of that information for planning instruction, is the most reliable way of preventing children from falling behind and staying behind" (2000, 23).

In addition, research has shown that assessment in kindergarten can be key to catching problems early, because

> 85% of those children likely to become poor readers can be identified with tests of their abilities to manipulate letter sounds, to rapidly name letters and numbers, and to demonstrate an awareness of the concepts of print (*The Special Edge* 2000, 6).

To support the use of assessment to diagnose problems, some schools and districts have begun to provide teachers with training in: 1) how to better design and analyze results from assessments of the type they have always conducted; and 2) how to quickly and efficiently conduct periodic assessments of individual students. Because students' literacy skills change over time and should be frequently evaluated, Kame'enui and Simmons suggest that assessment measures used should be easy to administer, easily repeated, and both time and cost efficient (1998, 21).

Effective assessment is aligned with curriculum, to ensure that students are being tested on the material that has been taught. In addition, for assessment to drive instruction, it must be ongoing. Frequent evaluation makes it possible for teachers to tailor instruction to the needs of their students, by providing information about the skills their classes and individual students have mastered—or not mastered. Having anecdotal evidence of successes and failures helps teachers pinpoint areas where further help is needed.

Blue Ribbon Schools: How Principals Promote Reading

Innovative principals across the nation are striving to raise reading achievement for all students in their schools. Some take a schoolwide approach by engaging non-teaching staff and teachers from other disciplines. Others are pairing children from different grades to read together.

Many are reaching out to parents and the community to support young readers through extended learning time after school and in the home. Creative events and book challenges inspire students and motivate them to read more often.

Here are some examples from the National Association of Elementary School Principals:

Schoolwide Focus:

- At an elementary school in Cape Coral, Florida, teachers, staff, parents, and peers all serve as reading "teachers." As a supplement to classroom instruction, school-wide activities build reading and writing skills in social studies, science, health, and mathematics.
- A principal in Washington, Pennsylvania, rescheduled a dozen Title I teachers to reduce class sizes for longer language arts sessions.
- Many schools are instituting schoolwide computer programs and other technology to aid, motivate, and monitor young readers.

Parents:

- At an elementary school in Boca Raton, Florida, parents support students in friendly competitions between teams to read the most books. Parents are coached to ask comprehension questions about each book before validating its completion, and the local newspaper publishes the pictures of top readers. School murals monitor team progress for all to see.
- Some schools hold Family Reading Nights each year, with vocabulary word bingo, musical chairs with phonics, computer reading games, and treasure maps for reading comprehension.

Peers:

- Many schools, such as one in Shreveport, Louisiana, use a "book buddy" system, which pairs an older student with a younger child for extended reading time. This approach can build skills of both learners as it boosts their motivation to read.
- Another school in Talladega, Alabama, encourages older students to be "roving readers" by reading aloud before lower grade-level classes to earn certificates of accomplishment. These students build fluency and confidence as they model successful reading for younger pupils.

Community:

- Schools such as one in Springfield, Illinois, bring tutors into the school for supplemental reading and writing activities. Tutors may be trained through AmeriCorps, senior citizens groups, or colleges in the America Reads Work-Study Program, among others. This approach connects the community at large with young learners who benefit from one-on-one attention to their reading progress. It also provides positive role models for pupils.
- Some schools, like one in Irmo, South Carolina, partner with the local library to engage elementary students in summer reading with the U.S. Department of Education's free Read*Write*Now! kits.

Fun with Books:

- A school in Grove City, Pennsylvania, holds an annual event at Halloween that motivates students to dress up as characters from favorite books and tour senior centers and nursing homes. Teachers also don costumes for this Literacy Parade, which is preceded by oral book reports that develop skills in comprehension and analysis.
- A Houston, Texas, school uses Scrabble games to build vocabulary.
- A Coventry, Rhode Island, school sponsors "Reading Month," with a PTA book fair, picnic, presentations of children's original books, and a challenge to choose books over TV.
- Other principals promise fun rewards for the whole school for exceeding book goals, such as a hot air balloon demonstration, ice cream parties, or seeing the principal eat lunch on the roof.

Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals. 1998. *Best Ideas for Reading from America's Blue Ribbon Schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Online: www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/educators_blueribn.html

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More Targeted Support for Students Who Need It

Even with high-quality early grades reading instruction and support provided during content-area instruction, some students will need additional help. The interventions used to help struggling readers vary in nature, duration, and focus. The following are some common characteristics of successful approaches:

- Students receive individualized or small-group instruction.
- Students are taught to read using meaningful texts that they can relate to.
- Students have opportunities for repeated reading of passages.
- Books that contain predictable vocabulary and sentence structures are used.
- Students learn reading strategies to help them decipher text.

Since school resources, staff time, and student time are limited, it is vital to implement programs that are most likely to be effective in providing extra help to below-grade-level readers. Education leaders should consider the following criteria when designing or choosing such a program:

- The intervention program should be intensive enough to close the ever-widening gap between poor readers and their grade-level peers as quickly as possible.
- It should be grounded in research about the acquisition of reading skills.
- For older readers, it must include instruction that builds the skills they missed developing in the primary grades.
- The intervention must match the student's level of reading, since each stage of growth requires a special focus.

For very poor readers, the instruction must be designed to develop students' phonological skills, since their inability to correctly identify speech sounds typically acts as a barrier to developing other reading related skills. For less impaired readers who *can* decipher words through sounds, text reading fluency should be the target for instruction. Vocabulary development should be targeted through direct instruction as well as through providing opportunities for and encouraging extensive reading (Moats 2001, 37).

Steinberg (1998) suggests that instruction for struggling readers should also include more time for reading and writing than that scheduled for students who are not having problems. She recommends that special instruction—tutoring, small-group instruction, etc.— be provided on a daily basis for most, if not the entire school year.

Support for Staff Development

In response to the call for early reading initiatives, frequent reading assessments, and the introduction of reading into the content areas, there has been a renewed emphasis on the need for high-quality professional development in the area of reading for all teachers (Donnelly 2000). It is obvious that focused, high-quality staff development will be required to support a district or schoolwide effort to decrease the number of students reading below grade level.

Districts and schools that have effectively evaluated and restructured their reading programs begin by studying the goals they have for student learning. They analyze assessment data to identify problem areas and then ask: how can we better prepare our teachers to address both our goals and problems that have been identified?

Staff development workshops that take the form of a series of sessions and provide hands-on training or concrete examples are most likely to be effective. Donnelly (2000) writes, "quick fixes are not likely to help when children are not learning to read. The root of the problem is often related to what teachers know and understand about children's learning to read. Many teachers do not have a conceptual understanding of reading." In order to gain this understanding, and the knowledge of how to teach children to read, ongoing professional development is necessary. All teachers must learn to evaluate the results of their teaching by asking questions such as "What reading skills have my students learned?" and then using the answers to move ahead or go back and re-teach based on individual student needs (Donnelly 2000). Participation in professional development about reading instruction should help teachers better assess the strengths and weaknesses of their students and teach them how to use this information to inform instruction.

The development of a high-quality reading program requires hard work and time. The first step to building such a program is for the principal to become knowledgeable about the critical elements of effective reading programs. The principal who knows and understands these elements can educate the staff, identify and collect valuable instructional and program resources, and provide sufficient opportunities for training when necessary. By reading and using this guide, you're off to a good start in ensuring the development of a high-quality reading program in your school.

The Effective School Program for Improving Reading Achievement

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) identifies research-based principles for improving student reading achievement.

At successful schools:

- Entire school staffs, not just first-grade teachers, are involved in bringing children to high levels of achievement.
- Goals for reading achievement are clearly stated.
- High expectations are shared with all participants.
- Instructional means for attaining these goals are articulated.
- Shared assessments are used to monitor children's progress.
- Instructional programs in successful schools have many components, including:
  - a range of materials and technology;
  - a focus on reading and writing;
  - parental involvement in their children's reading and homework; and
  - community partnerships, including volunteer tutoring programs

Source: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). 1998.

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Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 3
What Does Good Reading Instruction Look Like at the Classroom Level?

In your role as instructional leader of your school, you need to develop your own knowledge about the various aspects of literacy instruction and then use this knowledge to help teachers improve reading instruction in their classrooms. In this section, we look at the skills children need to develop in order to grow into competent readers, the instructional techniques that research indicates are most effective in helping students develop these skills, and the key role of good teaching.

Understanding the Continuum of Literacy Development

While noting that reading is a complex process, Snow, Burns, and Griffin identify three "main accomplishments [that] characterize good readers":

- They understand the alphabetic system of English to identify printed words.
- They have and use background knowledge and strategies to obtain meaning from print.
- They read fluently; they are able to read with accuracy, quickness, and expression (1998, 6).

To help students develop these competencies, principals and teachers first must understand the continuum of literacy development. Such an understanding enables teachers to provide effective, age-appropriate reading instruction as well as to identify students who are struggling. Lists of developmentally appropriate skills have been developed for use with children from preschool through most of the elementary grades. The locations of some of these lists are highlighted in the box on the following page.

Sample "Checklists" of Grade-level Reading Skills

- *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* This report was written by Snow, Burns, and Griffin and published in 1998 by the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children and the National Research Council. A full copy of the report is available online at lab.nap.edu/html/prdyc/. Lists of age- and grade-specific skills can be found in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 of Chapter 2 of the report. (Selected examples are shown below.)
- *Checkpoints for Progress in Reading and Writing for Families and Communities.* Provides a very simple and brief overview of skills children typically learn with regard to reading and writing at specified ages and grade levels. Online at www.ed.gov/pubs/CheckFamilies.
- *The Idaho Reading Indicator.* Effective July 1999, Idaho law requires all students in kindergarten and grades 1 to 3 to have their reading skills assessed twice a year using the Idaho Reading Indicator. A list of skills students are expected to master during the fall, winter, and spring of these years is included in the *Parent's Guide to the Idaho Reading Indicator.* Online at www.sde.state.id.us/IRI/parent.htm.

The following are examples of the competencies developed by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) for children at two different age levels:

Three-to-Four-Year-Old Accomplishments (partial list):

- knows that alphabet letters are a special type of graphic that can be individually named;
- knows that it is the print that is read in stories;
- uses new vocabulary in speech;
- recognizes words that have a repeated sound (such as cat and hat, or Peter and pumpkin);
- displays reading and writing attempts;
- when reading a story, can connect information and events to life experiences;
- recognizes local environmental print.

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Third-Grade Accomplishments (partial list):

- reads aloud grade-level texts with fluency and comprehension;
- uses strategies to decode words;
- can identify specific words that are causing comprehension difficulties;
- infers word meaning from taught roots, prefixes, and suffixes;
- summarizes major points from fiction and nonfiction texts.

While there are less likely to be similar lists of expected literacy skills for upper elementary and middle school students, we do know that reading in the upper grades differs markedly from reading in the early grades. Students in the intermediate grades are expected to have the comprehension skills necessary to read in the content areas. In the early grades, reading instruction focused on *learning to read*, but in the intermediate grades, reading instruction focuses primarily on *reading to learn*. That is, reading becomes a tool for gathering information about a subject area.

How Should Reading Be Taught?

What is the most effective method for helping children move along the continuum of literacy skill? This question has been the subject of heated debate. Traditionally, it has been the responsibility of teachers, principals, and other school administrators to determine what combination of instructional techniques to use in the classroom. Recently, however, a number of states across the country have enacted legislation or developed programs that prescribe the method of reading instruction public schools must use (Allington and Woodside-Jiron 1997).

In spite of the arguments and legislation, there are several widely held principles essential to effective instruction that most educators and researchers agree on:

- Effective early reading instruction is crucial to all children. All children must learn to read so that they can read to learn. Since so much future learning is predicated on the ability to read, every child requires the best possible foundation in reading.
- Early identification and intervention are vital. Some children have more difficulty learning to read than others. Therefore, effective methods for preventing and addressing these difficulties must be included in any comprehensive instructional plan (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998).
- There are basic skills all students must acquire to read effectively. These skills include phonemic awareness, decoding strategies, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies (Education Commission of the States 1998).

Reading Timeline: Not a Moment, But a Process

Experts stress that learning to read and write is not an act, but many steps on a developmental continuum. Preschool and primary school teachers can assess individual children's progress by setting realistic goals and allowing for individual variations. It is appropriate to expect most children to achieve "early reading" by age seven. Children with learning disabilities, limited English proficiency, or other learning challenges also need high, but achievable goals. These goals should be established by teachers, families, and specialists working together.

Phase 1: Preschool
Awareness and Exploration
Children explore their environment, building foundations for learning to read and write.

Phase 2: Kindergarten
Experimental Reading and Writing
Children develop the basic concepts of print and begin to experiment with reading and writing.

Phase 3: First Grade
Early Reading and Writing
Children read simple stories and write about meaningful topics.

Phase 4: Second Grade
Transitional Reading and Writing
Children begin to read more fluently and write using simple and more complex sentences.

Phase 5: Third Grade
Independent and Productive Reading and Writing
Children continue to refine reading and writing for different uses and audiences.

Phase 6: Fourth Grade and Up
Advanced Reading

Source: International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children. 1998.

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- Reading for meaning must be emphasized. Reading is a process of getting meaning from print, using knowledge about the written alphabet and about the sound structure of oral language for purposes of achieving understanding (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998).
- A comprehensive reading program requires attention to research, balanced instruction supported by adequate resources and intervention for struggling students, and teacher training.

The idea of "balanced" instruction has gained more prominence in recent years. A 1996 survey of approximately 3,000 elementary school teachers found that "a majority of teachers embrace a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices in compatible ways" (Baumann, et al. 1998). Research supports the effectiveness of such an approach. For example, a study by Pressley, et al. (1998) compared the instruction of the "most effective" and "least effective" teachers in 30 first-grade classrooms across five states. The instruction of the most effective teachers included attention to explicit teaching of skills, an emphasis on literature, and "much reading and writing."

By combining aspects of phonics and whole language instruction, teachers can explicitly teach students the relationship between letters and sounds while increasing their comprehension skills and enthusiasm for reading by exposing them to interesting stories and real literature. In so doing, educators can actively address the common

Online Resources for Effective Literacy Instruction

The Internet resources below provide detailed information about beginning reading instruction, characteristics of effective literacy classrooms, and the essential components of high-quality research-based programs.

- "Beginning Reading Instruction: Components and Features of a Research-Based Reading Program." www.tea.state.tx.us/reading/begin_read.html
- "Components of a Balanced Literacy Program." instech.tusd.k12.az.us/BL/blcomp.htm
- "Learning to Read: Resources for Language Arts and Reading Research." www.toread.com
- "Overview of Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children." www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/psread0.htm

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obstacles to effective reading—difficulty with the alphabetic principle, failure to acquire and use comprehension skills, and lack of motivation (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998).

In accord with the notion that students benefit most from a "balanced" approach to literacy instruction, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) make the following general recommendations concerning literacy instruction in first through third grades:

- Beginning readers need explicit instruction and practice that lead to an appreciation that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud. Fluency should be promoted through practice with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level.

- Children who have started to read independently, typically second graders and above, should be encouraged to sound out and confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful texts, recognizing words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships. Although context and pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word.

- Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both of the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent.

- Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains, as well as through direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing the main idea, predicting events and outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings. This instruction can take place while adults read to students or when students read themselves.

- Once children learn some letters, they should be encouraged to write them, to use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and to use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place regularly and frequently to

encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it.

- Throughout the early grades, time, materials, and resources should be provided with two goals: a) to support daily independent reading of texts selected to be of particular interest for the individual student, and beneath the individual student's frustration level, in order to consolidate the student's capacity for independent reading; and b) to support daily assisted or supported reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure in order to promote advances in the student's capabilities.

Throughout the early grades, schools should promote independent reading outside school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments and expectations, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this goal (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998). Additionally, students should be reading high-quality literature; a list of suggested books can be found in Appendix A.

Good Teaching Is the Key

Of course, effective reading instruction begins with effective teaching. No lesson, no matter how well planned, can be successful if the other elements of effective teaching are not in place. For this reason, principals and teachers need an understanding of good teaching practices.

Effective teachers of reading must be effective teachers overall, meaning that they exhibit effective classroom management skills, actively engage their students, and make efficient use of instructional time. A reading lesson cannot succeed if the other elements of teaching, such as classroom management, a logical progression of lessons, and time management, are not in place.

However, exhibiting the general characteristics of effective teaching does not ensure a successful reading lesson. The lesson itself must be based on a thorough understanding of how children learn to read and how the essential reading skills can best be taught. The effective reading teacher must prepare well-developed, developmentally appropriate lessons within an effectively managed classroom environment. When observing a reading lesson, a principal needs to look for evidence of teacher competence in both of these areas.

Several themes emerge from the extensive research based on characteristics of effective teachers and productive classrooms. First, good classroom management is key. Wilson highlights the critical relationship between classroom management and instruction: "The job of a teacher is first and foremost to instruct, not to manage. Yet management and instruction are inherently interdependent—in order for the learning

Checklist for Effective Reading Instruction

The U.S. Department of Education's National Institute for Literacy offers helpful checklists as tools for both education leaders and parents to ensure that quality reading instruction is being provided to students in both the early and intermediate grades.

In the effective classroom for beginning readers, you will see:

- ✔ Both direct instruction in sound-symbol relationships and exposure to motivating, interesting reading materials
- ✔ A focus on the relationships between letters and sounds and the process of obtaining meaning from print
- ✔ Instruction that makes clear connections to children's daily experiences and needs
- ✔ Rich language and literacy environments
- ✔ High-quality instructional materials, including materials that students can read to themselves easily and more difficult texts that a child can learn to read with the teacher
- ✔ Students familiar with basic purposes and methods of reading and writing
- ✔ Frequent and intensive opportunities for students to read both aloud and to themselves
- ✔ Students talking about books and stories in ways that enrich their vocabularies
- ✔ Practice recognizing and producing letters
- ✔ Practice emphasizing the sound structure of words
- ✔ Volunteer tutors used only for practice and motivational support:
  - Helping read to children
  - Supervising oral readings
  - Talking with students about what they read
- ✔ Additional instruction through supplementary reading programs for students who are slightly behind expected levels

In the effective classroom for intermediate readers, you will see:

- ✔ Assessment of students' reading ability (both fluency and word recognition) and strategies to help struggling readers catch up
- ✔ Modeling of reading and comprehension strategies for students
- ✔ Opportunities for students to build fluency through frequent practice reading with different types of text such as stories, reports, letters, newspapers, and magazines
- ✔ Students reading in pairs and groups
- ✔ Activities that require students to obtain meaning from print
- ✔ Use of words and language to accomplish projects and learn about specific topics
- ✔ Access to good libraries

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Institute for Literacy. 2000. *Reading: Know What Works.* Washington, DC: Author.

Language and Literacy Checklist for Early Education Settings

- Do adults interact with children in a positive, engaging manner?
- Is the ratio of children to adults suitable for the age group, so that children can get sufficient appropriate attention?
- Do teachers attempt to converse with children one-to-one and in small groups throughout the day?
- Are children read aloud to on a daily basis?
- Is the number of books available to children sufficient?
- Is a variety of types of books offered to children?
- Do teachers model the uses of literacy, so that children begin to understand how it functions in their lives?
- Are regularly scheduled meetings held with parents in which language and literacy development are discussed?
- Are informal conversations and conferences held with parents in order to learn more about their children from their point of view?
- Are teachers involved in an ongoing program of professional development that includes support for their understandings about how to foster young children's language and literacy?

Source: Strickland, 2001.

environment to be at its best, both elements must be present, and working side by side, all the time" (1996, 2).

Second, actively focusing on students—and providing an environment in which they actively focus on learning—is critical. Mary Beth Blegen, teacher-in-residence at the U.S. Department of Education, puts a very personal face on what this means in practice:

> My day as a teacher was filled with all kinds of kids. What I taught wasn't ever as important as what was happening for those kids in that room. A yellowed piece of paper taped to my desk asked me every

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The Effective First-Grade Reading Teacher

Researchers identified nine characteristics shared by outstanding first-grade reading teachers in five states. In these classrooms, most students were reading and writing at or above first-grade level. The characteristics of these teachers include:

1. **Ability to Motivate High Academic Engagement and Competence**
   Most students were engaged in academic activities most of the time, even when the teacher left the room.

2. **Excellent Classroom Management**
   Teachers in the most effective classrooms managed student behavior, student learning, and instructional aides and specialists well, using a variety of methods.

3. **Ability to Foster a Positive, Reinforcing, Cooperative Environment**
   These classrooms were positive places. The rare discipline problems were handled constructively. Students received a lot of positive reinforcement for their accomplishments, both privately and publicly, and students were encouraged to cooperate with one another.

4. **Teaching Skills in Context**
   Word-level, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, and writing skills were typically taught in the context of actual reading and writing tasks.

5. **An Emphasis on Literature**
   The students selected books from extensive classroom collections. The teachers read literature and conducted author studies.

6. **Much Reading and Writing**
   Teachers set aside 45 minutes for language arts, providing long, uninterrupted periods for reading and writing. Both the students and teacher read daily to themselves, to a buddy, to a group, to an adult volunteer, or to the class as a whole. Everyone wrote daily in journals.

7. **A Match between Accelerating Demands and Student Competence**
   The teachers set high but realistic expectations and consistently encouraged students to try more challenging (but not overwhelming) tasks.

8. **Encouraging Self-Regulation**
   Teachers taught students to self-regulate, encouraging students to choose appropriate skills when they faced a task rather than wait for the teacher to dictate a particular skill or strategy.

9. **Connections across Curricula**
   Teachers made explicit connections across the curriculum—providing students with opportunities to use the skills they were learning. Reading and writing were integrated with other subjects.

Source: National Research Center on English Learning Achievement. 1998. *The Effective Teacher.* Online: www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/educators_effteach.html.

> day, "What are the kids taking from this class into their world?" If I listened to that question, the classroom was a place of questioning and arguing and thinking with kids at the center. If I forgot that question, the classroom too easily became my classroom with kids only filling in the spaces" (2000, 12).

Third, effective teachers make excellent use of time. They have clear goals and align curriculum and instruction to achieving these goals.

Allington found that effective reading teachers provide more time for students to read. His observations of classrooms indicated that, given an hour of time allocated to reading lessons, more-effective teachers had children actually read for an average of 45 minutes and used the remaining time in preparation and follow-up activities. In contrast, less-effective teachers often spent more time in preparation and follow-up activities and gave students less time to actually read. He observed similar disparities during social studies and science lessons, especially in the upper grades. "The more effective teachers simply had students reading two and three times as much material in these content areas as did the less effective teachers" (2001, 34).

As you observe teachers' reading lessons, make sure to be looking for these other components of effective teaching as well. In your role as principal, your assistance is key in helping your staff become good teachers in general, as well as effective teachers of reading.

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 4
Using Assessment Data to Inform Reading Instruction

Assessment is a vital tool in any effective reading program. Good assessments provide data to help teachers determine the current knowledge and skills that individual students possess. When analyzed and interpreted, the information generated by assessments can be used to as the basis for crucial instructional decisions about pacing, remediation, and the introduction of new information, as well as staff development and program design.

There are a wide variety of assessment methods available for measuring student progress in reading. To name just a few, they include structured observations, formal interviews, conferences, portfolio collections of work samples, teacher-made quizzes and tests, student essay assignments, constructed responses, standardized tests, journaling, classroom discussions, and daily seatwork and homework assignments. In other words, assessment may look like any other classroom activity.

Because assessment of student progress is key to ensuring that instruction is both on-target and effective, a school's assessment activities should be a carefully planned component of its instructional framework. Assessment is an especially important aspect of early literacy programs since children are expected to develop a wide variety of reading-related skills rapidly. By using carefully developed and selected assessments with these young children, schools can ensure that the reading instruction provided is synchronized with student needs and that no child is left behind.

Shepard, Kagan, and Wurtz state that a good assessment system:

- supports learning;
- helps to identify special needs; and
- provides information for program evaluation and monitoring of trends (2001, 7).

An effective early literacy assessment system should include components that address all these needs.

Purposes of Reading Assessment

At the school or district level, reading assessments are often used to evaluate how well a program is meeting its goals and objectives (NAEYC and NAECS/SDE 1991; Hills 1999). Many states are now requiring standardized early literacy assessments with the results available on a school-by-school and, often, a classroom-by-classroom basis. This information is particularly helpful when the results include detailed analyses about the mastery of individual skills. Poor results may indicate, for example, the need for a reorganization of the scope and sequence of reading instruction or the need for staff development focused on particular areas.

In recent years, research has identified another critical purpose for assessment: the identification of students with reading-related difficulties and the provision of additional help before they fall too far behind. Lyon cites some compelling statistics: 85 to 90 percent of struggling readers can increase their reading skills to average reading levels through participation in early intervention programs that include instruction in phonics, phoneme awareness, spelling, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies. However, "if we delay early intervention until nine-years-of-age (the time that most children with reading difficulties first receive services), approximately 75 percent of these children will continue to have difficulties learning to read throughout their high school and adult years" (1997).

Thus, while older children and adults can be taught to read, Lyon suggests that "the time and expense of doing so is enormous compared to what is required to teach them when they are five or six years old." As much for this reason as any other, frequent assessment of both an informal and formal nature should be an integral component of an early reading program.

Finally, the results of reading assessments can also be used to inform parents about their child's progress (NAEYC and NAECS/SDE 1991). Helping parents to understand the specific details about their child's strengths and weaknesses puts them in a better position to assist their children in their reading development. In support of this, some states and districts provide information on what children in a particular grade should know and be able to do—written in a way that has meaning for parents. For example, the Chicago Public Schools (2001) have posted this information about objectives for first-grade reading; these children should be able to:

- retell a story that was read or heard;
- use past experiences to understand a new story;

- decide the ending of a story from what is heard;
- use long and short vowel sounds in one-syllable words (not, note);
- recognize word patterns and families (at, cat); and
- find synonyms (little, small) and antonyms (little, big).

A well-designed assessment "program" should take these different purposes into account and, in addition, use the results of individual assessments appropriately (Shepard, Kagan, and Wurtz 2001). For example, while the results of a "running record" can help a teacher with instructional planning for a student, these results should not be used to make decisions about student placement in a remedial program unless other data supporting the move is available.

Examples of Effective Use of Assessment Data

Reading assessment data are used in a targeted way by a growing number of schools and districts to set a "course of action" for instructional improvement. Some examples are provided below.

- In the Ysleta Independent School District in Texas, improvements in student achievement began with disaggregation and study of data from the state tests, using an item-by-item analysis. The process has become even more important over time:

  > Principals confer with teachers to review the data from the standpoint of both classrooms and individual students. Planning is focused on what instruction seems to need improvement as well as what worked, with much of the work done in teacher teams. Teachers review the needs of their "new" students while planning instruction for the current year. Principals reported this to be time-consuming but productive work. Eileen Wade, principal of Desert View Middle School, views these meetings as having benefits beyond simply the focus on instruction. They provide the framework for staff to communicate, discuss issues, and share ideas (Cawelti and Protheroe 2001, 67-68).

- In explaining its exceptionally large one-year gains on the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments, Pine Spring Elementary School in Fairfax County, Virginia, pointed to its use of assessment data as a powerful lever for improvement. Specifically,

  > teachers and administrators spent hours analyzing test scores and other data to pinpoint students' weaknesses—by grade level, by subject and finally by individual child. Then the school made

adjustments to address these weaknesses. Students with similar academic needs were sometimes grouped together for special instruction (Benning 2000, B4).

- The Montgomery County Public School District in Maryland has implemented a system of short, detailed checks of individual student progress in reading and math in all its elementary schools. For example, the county-developed Early Childhood Assessment Program test is administered to children three times each year. Using information collected through these assessments, students are assigned to different reading groups that focus on the teaching of particular skills. In addition, running records are administered, perhaps twice a month for children who are doing well and almost daily for children who are having problems with reading. Groups of no more than four students are used to provide on-target instruction for these children (Mathews 2000, A1).

Guidelines for Assessing Early Readers

Using a Balance of Formal and Informal Assessment Methods

By understanding various evaluation methods and choosing assessments that match the purposes for testing, teachers and administrators have an increased chance of obtaining revealing information that will enhance teaching and learning. In order to fully assess students and make the best educational decisions based on their needs, a mixture of formal and informal assessment methods should be used.

In Valencia's view,

> a complete assessment system....includes a balance of formal normative tests that help teachers and administrators know how students are performing compared to other students across the nation or the state; formal assessments published in conjunction with instructional programs that help teachers and students know how well students are learning; informal classroom work samples, performances, and observations that help teachers and students evaluate the application of skills to everyday learning; and student self-assessment that helps students become self-directed learners (1997).

The term "formal assessment" often brings to mind visions of children sitting in straight rows filling in "bubbles" on a standardized achievement test. While this vision may not be entirely applicable to early grades reading assessment, the reality is that some young students do participate in standardized reading assessments. In some instances, depending on the grade level, these tests include multiple-choice items designed to measure a specific reading skill. For younger students, such tests may be administered orally, with students prompted to circle or point to a word represented by a picture.

Early Childhood Testing Guidelines

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education developed guidelines to aid educators in making informed decisions about curriculum, content, and assessment; evaluating existing curriculum and current testing practices; and transitioning to more appropriate approaches. With regard to assessment, they suggest the following principles, among others:

- Curriculum and assessment are integrated throughout the program; assessment is congruent with and relevant to the goals, objectives, and content of the program.
- Assessment results in benefits to the child such as needed adjustments in the curriculum or more individualized instruction and improvements in the program.
- A regular process exists for periodic information sharing between teachers and parents about children's growth and development and performance. The method of reporting to parents does not rely on letter or numerical grades, but rather provides more meaningful, descriptive information in narrative form.
- Results of screening tests are not used to make decisions about entrance to school or as the single criterion for placement in a special program, but rather used as part of a thorough process of diagnosis designed to ensure that children receive the individual services they need.
- Performance data of children collected by teachers to plan instruction are summarized and quantified by teachers and administrators to use in evaluating how well the program is meeting its goals for children and families.

Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education 1991, 32-34.

When the results are reported, scores frequently appear in the form of percentiles, grade equivalents, and national curve equivalents. Often these scores are then aggregated by grade and school to allow scores to be compared across individuals, classes, schools,

and states (Stowell and Tierney 1995, 78). Tests such as the California Achievement Test, Iowa Achievement Test, and the Stanford 9 are included in this category of assessment.

Obviously, standardized formal assessment measures have some drawbacks and cannot be used to fulfill some of the many purposes for assessment discussed earlier. Perhaps the biggest drawback of such tests is that scores are received several weeks, if not months, after the test is taken—too late to be of use in planning instruction for the group of children who took the test. In addition, formal standardized tests often are given infrequently, may have questionable reliability given children's rapid developmental gains in the early years, and are time-consuming to administer (Stowell and Tierney 1995, 79). Despite these drawbacks, standardized literacy assessments do serve a purpose. They allow the overall effectiveness of programs to be assessed, and many allow students' scores to be compared across classrooms and schools.

Some states have created their own standardized assessments to measure early literacy achievement. Two such states are Virginia and Idaho.

- In Virginia, kindergarten students must be screened early in the school year using the Virginia Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) or a similar program. This test assesses a child's knowledge of the alphabetic code, phonological awareness (specifically rhyme and beginning sound), and ability to recognize lower-case letters (PALS undated).
- As part of the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) program, all K-3 students are assessed in the fall and winter, with the option to test in the spring if needed. Like the PALS assessment, the IRI for kindergarten tests a child's ability to detect rhyme and syllables, and to identify uppercase and lowercase letters (Idaho Department of Education undated).

Both the PALS and IRI assessments can be used as diagnostic tools to identify areas of weaknesses before they become large obstacles to the reading process.

Many school districts are also implementing "standardized" approaches to early literacy assessment. For example, the K-2 Student Assessment Portfolio used by Durham Public Schools includes information collected through Marie Clay's Observation Survey and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The *Observation Survey* consists of six different tasks: letter identification, word test, concepts about print, writing vocabulary, dictation, and text reading level. The DRA is used to obtain each student's text reading level, with comprehension. In some cases, all students are tested using a given instrument or task, while in other instances only those students performing below grade level are to be tested. Depending on the child's grade level and reading level, different combinations of these Survey tasks are used to monitor progress.

Embedding Assessments in Instruction

Although formal assessment measures, such as the PALS and IRI programs as well as "traditional" standardized tests such as the Stanford 9 and Iowa Achievement Test, provide useful data for instructional decision making, the value of more frequent informal assessment measures is becoming more widely recognized. As Valencia (1997) states, "in the past ten years, we have witnessed a revolution in assessment, one that has finally taken hold in classrooms, schools, districts, states, and the nation."

Informal assessment is obviously not new; it has always been part of the repertoire of good teachers. Techniques such as running records, anecdotal records, informal reading inventories, and observation provide teachers with immediate feedback that can be used to improve and adjust the instructional methods used with individual children. In addition, these assessments can be embedded in regular classroom instruction. Teachers should be encouraged to look at the activities they conduct every day and to ask themselves, what do these tell me about the students in my class?

Informal Assessment at Work: The "Assessment Interview"

A fourth-grade teacher conducts an "assessment interview" while meeting with a small group of students during reading workshop. She hands each student a copy of the book being used and asks each student to view and consider the cover, title, and illustrations. As the students do this, they discuss what they notice, generate questions, and predict what the book may be about. After this initial activity, students read the book individually, stopping to discuss their thoughts, reactions, and questions as necessary. Although the teacher has a few prompts for discussion, she mainly allows conversational topics to be determined by the students.

As the students discuss the story, the teacher gleans much information about each child's comprehension of the story, the reading strategies each child is using, and each child's level of engagement with the text. She is also able to observe their reading behavior—use of work attack strategies and rereading, amount of fidgeting, and reading speed—as she watches them read independently. A technique such as an assessment interview can easily be embedded in classroom instruction and provides teachers with a wealth of information about a child's reading skills.

Source: Harvey and Goudvis 2000.

Teachers are also finding that "authentic" activities—for example, asking even early grades students to write a letter—can be embedded in classroom instruction and provide immediate feedback concerning students' strengths and weaknesses. For example, does a second-grade student demonstrate that he understands the meaning of punctuation marks by using them appropriately? Valencia (1997) suggests the particular value of these activities derives from their use in "contexts that closely resemble actual situations in which those abilities are used."

While many teachers are eager to obtain feedback about their students' progress, the new trend towards frequent informal reading assessment also raises many questions and issues. Topping the list of concerns is when and how to use each assessment and the specific skills to assess. Assessment has many different purposes and audiences; thus, teachers must know why they are assessing a particular skill and who will have knowledge of the outcomes.

For example, a teacher asks a student to read aloud from a book. As the student reads, the teacher makes comments, perhaps on a checklist, noting mispronounced

Informal Assessment at Work:
"Story Construction from a Picture Book"

Christina E. Van Kraayenoord and Scott G. Paris developed an assessment activity called "Story Construction from a Picture Book" as a performance-based, authentic assessment of young children's skills in comprehending and describing the relationship among a series of pictures. The activity provides information about young children's meaning making even if children do not yet have clear concepts about print or if they are just beginning to develop literacy behaviors.

To conduct the assessment, choose a picture book with an identifiable narrative. Then, ask a child to tell you the "story" by reading the pictures. The story line that the child develops reveals much about the child's understanding of the information, actions, and feelings in the story and the child's emerging skill at expanding the story beyond the information given. Because the activity does not use printed text, the authors suggest that it may be particularly useful for those students whose first language is not English.

Source: Van Kraayenoord and Paris 1996.

words, self-corrections, omissions, and responses to comprehension questions. At the same time, the teacher is also making notes about the child's reading habits and comfort level with the text. An informal assessment, such as this running record, is primarily intended for the teacher's and child's benefit. From the information obtained, the teacher can determine the child's reading level, compare past and present performances, and decide the areas in which the child may need further help. The child will benefit by having instructional materials tailored to his level. The results also can be shared with the child's parents during a conference to highlight progress made as well as strengths and weaknesses.

Using Assessment to Facilitate Communication with Parents

As previously discussed, a primary goal of an early literacy assessment program is to provide parents, as well as teachers and administrators, with information about their child's progress. Informal assessment measures are often easily understood by parents, as they do not contain percentages, mean scores, or other statistical terms. In particular, rubrics and portfolios provide a good means of communicating to parents expectations concerning work standards and the child's progress towards meeting the set goals.

Rubrics

Sometimes a rubric can be used to assist teachers in scoring student responses to "interview" questions, writing samples, or other types of assessments. With a rubric to guide the assessment measure, teachers are more likely to apply the assessment consistently across students. When communicating with parents, teachers can refer to the rubric, using it to cite why the student received a certain score and what the student needs to do to receive a higher score on the task. Parents often find rubrics useful for the guidelines they provide for task evaluation and find it easier to help their children when they know the specific proficiencies that the child will be asked to achieve.

For example, when trying to determine a student's place within the continuum of reading development, a teacher may wish to refer to the K-3 Developmental Continuum created by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Online at www.nwrel.org/assessment/pdfRubrics/k3devcontinuum.PDF). The rubrics developed by NWREL describe several characteristics (decoding conventions, establishing comprehension, realizing context, developing interpretation, integrating for synthesis, and critiquing for evaluation) through five stages of reading competence ("emerging" through "bridging"). Teachers can use this guide to assess student strengths and weaknesses and to set performance goals. As an example, the rubrics for evaluating comprehension are provided below.

Emerging

- Make meaningful predictions based on illustrations.

- Identifying characters in a story.
- Relying on illustrations more heavily than print for meaning.

Beginning

- Using sentence strategies with modeling and guidance.
- Finding the "main character" in a story.
- Retelling beginning, middle, and end with guidance.
- Relying on illustrations and print.

Developing

- Using pre-reading strategies, during reading, and post-reading strategies with deliberation.
- Distinguishing between an obvious major and minor character.
- Retelling beginning, middle, and end by self.
- Summarizing with references to single "parts" of stories: characters, plot, and setting.
- Using reading strategies consistently.

Expanding

- Learning that a "detail" is used to describe an element of a story.
- Summarizing "whole" stories in addition to their parts.
- Summarizing a literary "purpose" (explaining the moral of a fable, for example) with guidance.
- Relying primarily on print to establish understanding.

Bridging

- Actively seeking print to gain understanding (I want to read to find out).
- Beginning to distinguish between significant and supporting detail.
- Summarizing whole stories and parts of stories with ease.

Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios provide another means through which teachers can assess early literacy skills and use the results when communicating student progress to parents. Like authentic assessments, portfolio assessment is grounded in the idea that assessment should be embedded in instruction, responsive to what students are doing, and represent the range

of activities in which students are involved. In addition, portfolios serve a unique function—they allow evidence of student growth to be easily seen over a period of time (Stowell and Tierney 1995). It is this aspect of portfolio assessment that appeals to teachers and parents alike—and that often provides the means for an in-depth conversation about a child's progress over the course of a semester or year.

An early reading portfolio for a student contains a variety of pieces of work, collected over an extended period of time and, in addition, representative of different skill areas. Oftentimes, teachers and students collaborate to choose the examples included in the portfolio. As work samples are selected, the teacher and student discuss the work, noting the student's strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement shown. Depending on the age of the child, the student may write a paragraph describing why he chose a particular assignment to be included in the portfolio. A typical early literacy portfolio might contain work samples such as: an illustration summarizing the main idea of a story, a reading passage and some questions answered in response to it, a writing sample, a teacher's anecdotal notes concerning reading behavior, a student literature response journal entry, and a paragraph describing a favorite book.

Focusing on Assessment Data

As schools and districts begin to make more extensive use of reading assessment data, they should look first at the instruments used to measure student learning. Fox suggests that an analysis of the tests should include a look forward to the data they would provide. For example, to what degree does the reading assessment "provide data that lead to purposeful, targeted and systematic instruction?" (2000, 22). The "best" assessments are those that have been carefully aligned with standards, since these provide information about knowledge and skills that students are expected to master.

However, even if the test is a "good" one, the results of the assessments may not be helpful if it is not presented in a user-friendly format. The Mesa Public School District in Arizona ensures that each school does have helpful, on-target data available to it by annually providing each principal with a data book that presents the school's achievement indicators from the previous year (Stanford 9 scores, district test results, AIMS results, etc.). The data are organized and analyzed to enable the school staff to answer the following questions:

- Are our overall scores acceptable?
- How did students do on specific objectives?
- How did different sub-populations score? (analyzed by ethnicity, mobility, poverty, and language-minority status)
- How have scores changed over time?

School staff are then expected to be "educational detectives [who] develop hypoth-

eses about the reasons for strengths and weaknesses revealed by the data, [who] are asked to 'Look at the patterns, see what areas you can improve, and develop improvement strategies'" (Educational Research Service 2000, 2).

Schools that have embedded the use of assessment data into their instructional improvement efforts have also found that using the results of only one annual test is too limiting. Specifically, they "provide too little information too infrequently to allow teachers to adjust their instruction to reflect changing student needs during the course of the academic year" (Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development. 2001, 15). Thus many districts developed additional assessments—typically much shorter so that they can be given more frequently—that parallel the state-required assessments.

Pam Davis, an assistant principal in a Brazosport Independent School District middle school, explains how data from assessments developed by teacher teams are used in her school:

> We develop a profile sheet for every child using the data from the periodic assessments—and kids as well as teachers are able to use them. What we're looking for is a pattern over several assessments that a particular objective hasn't been mastered. Every day children who need them are provided with tutorials—with kids grouped by objective—while other students participate in sustained silent reading. It takes organization to group and regroup kids and teachers on a daily basis—but it's been worth it (Cawelti and Protheroe 2001, 30).

In addition to providing information about what specific students have—or have not—mastered, the results have helped teachers to identify their own personal strengths and areas in which they would like to improve. An important additional benefit of the use of assessment data has been the encouragement it provides for teachers to discuss and share instructional strategies.

Important First Steps

In an interview conducted by Dennis Sparks, Mike Schmoker provides some concrete suggestions for a school or district that wants to begin using assessment data to improve instruction:

> The school should concentrate on three very simple things—focused, collaborative learning, measurable goals, and data. Begin by looking at the data to establish one or two measurable goals. Have teachers get together in the summer when they have time and can be more relaxed to select or create periodic assessments by which they will measure progress related to that goal. Then have teams of teachers get together

> regularly to talk about their progress, focusing like a laser beam on specific emergent problems preventing students from doing well relative to that year-end goal. If a school does these things, it is all but certain to make some real progress (Sparks 2000).

With respect to reading instruction, this translates into providing teachers with adequate time to develop and/or familiarize themselves with available literacy assessments, creating a common "planning period" or block of time during the week for teachers to meet and review the progress of their students, and establishing target goals for students' reading achievement over the course of the year.

Important Questions about Literacy Assessment in Your School

Prior to beginning a schoolwide effort to improve the use of assessment data, teachers and school leaders should address the following questions to evaluate their current progress and level of student achievement.

- How are your students performing in relation to standards?
- Why are your students performing at the level they are?
- What could you do differently in order to increase the number of students meeting or exceeding standards?
- How can you monitor progress?

Source: Vermont Department of Education 1998.

In terms of reading instruction, the first step in using assessment data is to assess student's initial literacy ability. In the early grades, assessments used for this purpose often include tests of letter recognition, sight words, simple dictation, and letter-sound correspondence.

After this data is collected, it must be analyzed to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses. Based on this information, several questions should be considered, including: How has the student performed in past years? Is the language in which the test is conducted the student's native language? Does the student seem to enjoy reading? What types of reading experiences does the student seem to enjoy most? Has the student ever received remedial instruction in the past? Observations of student work habits and informal assessment measures should also be considered when planning performance

goals for a student. Once these targets have been set, frequent assessment—in the form of both formal and informal measures—is key to ensuring student achievement.

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 5
Providing Extra Support for Struggling Readers

Even with high-quality reading instruction in the early grades, some students fall behind. The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, an influential group organized by the National Research Council, estimated that:

> The educational careers of 25 to 40 percent of American children are imperiled because they don't read well enough, quickly enough, or easily enough to ensure comprehension in their content courses in middle and secondary school (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998, 98).

This poses a problem for the students themselves. It also creates challenges for teachers, who are responsible for content-area instruction and often face a class of students with varying reading abilities, and for principals, who ultimately must make decisions concerning the nature, type, and orientation of school-wide reading programs.

The bottom line: While a primary focus should be preventing reading difficulties—which good instruction for all students can do in most cases—the needs of students who are reading below grade level must be addressed if these students are to benefit from all aspects of their educational experiences.

Identifying Struggling Readers

There are many warning signs that may signal a reading problem. For instance, educators can use lists of age-appropriate competencies to identify students who are not able to demonstrate some of the skills typical for their grade level. As an example, using the partial list of third-grade skills presented earlier, a teacher might notice that a third grader demonstrates little knowledge of strategies to use when reading an unfamiliar word.

Other warning signals can be picked up as a teacher listens to children reading aloud. Signs of a struggling reader include:

- a labored approach to sounding out unknown words;
- repeated misidentification of known words;
- reading that is hesitant and includes many stops, starts, and mispronunciations; and
- poor comprehension (Lyon 1997).

Upper elementary and middle school teachers will typically have fewer opportunities to hear students read aloud. However, it is possible to use reading aloud productively in the upper grades. Green (1998) describes the Rapid Retrieval of Information (RRI) approach. Students begin by reading the text silently in class. Then the teacher poses questions that require recall as well as higher-level thinking skills such as drawing inferences and analyzing. Students skim the reading to search for answers, and the teacher calls on volunteers as well as nonvolunteers to read aloud the words or paragraphs that contain the answer. Green writes that RRI provides valuable diagnostic information regarding students' decoding skills, fluency, comprehension, and ability to skim information.

In addition to oral reading, poor performance on written work may be a sign of a reading difficulty that has not yet been diagnosed or addressed. Poorly organized paragraphs, lack of sequential train of thought, many spelling and punctuation errors, and limited vocabulary may all signal a student whose literacy skills are lagging.

Common Reading Difficulties for Elementary and Middle Schooi Children

- Poor comprehension
- Weak decoding skills
- Inadequate use of metacognitive strategies

Common Reading Problems and Suggested Remedial Strategies

While there are many types and variations of reading difficulties, three of the most common in elementary and middle school children are poor reading comprehension, weak decoding skills, and inadequate use of metacognitive strategies. The following bullets describe these difficulties in more detail and provide several strategies for remediating each problem.

Poor Reading Comprehension Skills

Comprehension is the understanding of what is heard or read. For some students, understanding or remembering what they have read is a source of difficulty, although they may be able to verbalize words and sometimes even read with fluency.

Crawley and Merritt suggest this lack of comprehension may be the result of many factors:

- The reading material may be too difficult (i.e., containing too many long words, sentences that are too complex or too long).
- The material may be dull or uninteresting.
- The student may not have the necessary background or schema for reading a selection.
- The student may overrely on decoding skills and view reading as a word-calling process.
- The student may have had an instructional emphasis on oral reading during which she concentrated on decoding and not meaning.
- The student may read too slowly and therefore be unable to chunk enough information together at a time to create meaning.
- The student may not know or understand that comprehension is the major purpose for reading and therefore may read without setting a purpose.
- The student may not concentrate on or attend to the reading task.
- Previous instruction may have concentrated on getting facts and not on higher levels of comprehension.
- The student may not be interested in reading or the subject he is reading about (1996, 40).

To help students better understand printed material, Crawley and Merritt suggest the following strategies and recommendations:

- *Provide easier reading materials.* If the student is reading without your assistance, be certain the material she or he is reading is at an independent level. If the student is engaged in instruction, be certain the material is no harder than the student's instructional level indicates it should be.
- *Teach students to select books.* Teach the student how to select a book for independent reading. Guide students in counting 100 consecutive words in the book. The student should then read this 100-word passage. If there are three or more unknown words, the book is too difficult.

- *Preview new vocabulary.* Before the student begins reading new material, take time to introduce the new words so that she or he can identify them and know their meanings.
- *Complete outlines.* Give the student a skeletal outline to complete after he or she reads the material. You should provide the main topics and subtopics. The student should fill in the details (1996, 41-42).

Weak Phonetic Decoding Skills

Phonetic decoding is the practice of decoding words by using the sound value of letters and/or groups of letters. In order to decode unknown words, students must associate letters with their sounds and blend them together to produce the word.

Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words can arise from a number of sources. Among these sources are the following:

- The student might be a visual rather than an auditory learner.
- Hearing loss problems might result in not hearing certain sounds.
- Students may lack auditory processing skills (such as determining similarities and differences between sounds, breaking words into their individual sounds, and combining separate sounds to form a word).
- Faulty articulation of sounds may create confusion when students associate sounds as they pronounce them with the articulation of the sounds by others (Crawley and Merritt 1996, 16).

Inadequate Use of Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition refers to having an awareness of what one is mentally "doing" while approaching a task. The term "metacognitive strategies" refers to the specific strategies a reader can use to monitor or check his/her understanding while reading a text passage.

Students may lack proficiency in the use of metacognitive strategies for a number of reasons. Crawley and Merritt cite the following, among others:

- A student may not know the difference between what he or she knows and doesn't know.
- A student may not know how to ask questions to guide his reading.
- A student may have trouble forming mental images as he reads.
- A student may have difficulty organizing text information.
- A student may not feel he has any control over what information he or she gets from a text.

Strategies to Help Students Improve Their Decoding Skills

The following strategies are recommended for working with students who exhibit signs of difficulty with the phonetic decoding of words:

- *Ear training.* Work on the auditory discrimination of sounds before adding visual symbols.
- *Use words the student knows.* Initially, use words that are in the student's listening vocabulary.
- *Deductive teaching*—single sounds.
  - Select the phonic element you wish to teach.
  - Tell your students the name of the phonic element you will be teaching them, and write the letters that stand for it on the board.

    CH ch
  - Write a list of words containing the element. Pronounce the words for the students. Then have the students pronounce the words along with you while they listen to the sound being taught.

    chair chop chin cheese
  - Ask students to contribute additional words that contain the same sound.

    chip churn chimp chocolate
  - Finally, have students listen as you say words. Some of the words should contain the sounds; some should not. Have students identify those words containing the sound.
- *Listening to rhymes.* Students can listen to nursery rhymes or poems and identify words that rhyme.

Source: Sharon J. Crawley and King Merritt. 1996.

- A student may know how to use metacognitive processes but not know that he is using them (1996, 66).

The primary goal of strategy instruction is "to foster independence on the part of the learner." Three components of the skill are considered essential—knowledge of what the strategy is, how to apply it, and when and where to use it (Jones et al. 1987, 41). Research suggests that the most important elements of effective strategy instruction are embedding skills in curriculum content and modeling strategic thinking.

Given this, what can be done to help students build metacognitive skills? Crawley and Merritt suggest that students should be explicitly taught to use some metacognitive approaches, such as the following:

- *Semantic mapping.* Before reading a selection, have students identify what they already know about a topic or concept. Place the major concept in a geometric shape at the center of the board. Then ask students what they think of when they hear the term. These can be placed in a figure in which the center circle is joined by spokes to smaller circles on the outside.
- *Modeling questions.* Read a passage with your students. Then select a student to ask you a question about the material. You should answer the student's question. If the question is at an inferential level, respond by saying something such as, "That's a good question. I have to think beyond what the author said to answer it." Next you should model questioning by asking your students questions that require inferential thinking. As you use this modeling strategy, you will notice that your students begin to ask higher-level questions.
- *Organizing.* Help students organize the text material through mapping techniques or outlines.
- *K-W-L (know—want to know—have learned).* Students list "what I know" and "want to know" before reading. After reading, they list "what I learned." Initially, this should be done as a class. As students gain skill, they can work in pairs or independently (1996, 67-68).

Providing Targeted Support When Needed

The interventions that schools provide for students who fall behind vary in nature, duration, and focus. Described here are characteristics of supplementary and tutoring programs that offer support to such students.

Supplementary Programs

In some cases, students will be placed in supplementary reading programs. These programs, which often must be purchased by schools and taught by trained professionals, vary in nature, duration, focus, and cost. When considering the use of new

Reading to Learn

Select the essential cognitive strategies your students need to be successful strategic readers.

- Train all of your teachers to teach those strategies.
- Give teachers the time and support they need to become strategic teachers.
- Integrate strategy instruction in the content areas year after year after year.

Source: McEwan 2001, 61.

supplementary reading programs, school staff must consider several questions meant to ensure they choose the program that best meets the needs of the participants, is consistent with the goals of the school, and can be carried out efficiently. The following questions should be answered before committing to a particular program:

- Are the goals of this program consistent with our school goals for reading at this level?
- Can the program realistically accommodate the number of students we have in need of assistance?
- Must the program be taught be trained professionals? If so, how long is the training program?
- Are the methods of instruction used in the program compatible with the instructional methods used by the classroom teacher?
- What is the success rate of the program?
- What type of students stand to benefit most from this program? Does this match the description of our students most likely to be referred to the program?

The selection of reading programs available for purchase by schools and districts is large, consequently requiring a large time commitment from principals interested in making a purchase. Do not commit to the first program you see, however; the time and effort you put into the research and identification of the best program for your school will pay off in the end.

The following are descriptions of three available programs representing a range of instructional emphases and approaches. For more complete information on these programs, including descriptions and evaluations of 18 other reading programs, please see the Ohio Department of Education publication, *Choosing A Reading Program: A Consumer's Guide,* available online at: www.ode.state.oh.us/.

- *Accelerated Reader*

  This computer-based program is designed as an independent activity for use by students in grades K-12, and aims to supplement classroom instruction by increasing the amount of text students read. Participating students read books of their choice and then answer computer-based quizzes to assess their comprehension.

- *The Waterford Early Reading Program*

  This program uses individualized, technology-based lessons to combine engaging literacy texts with direct, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. It is most commonly used as a supplemental program in grades PK-3.

- *HOSTS: Help One Student To Succeed*

  This is a structured language arts program that uses one-to-one academic mentoring to help low-achieving students improve reading, writing, and problem-solving skills. Mentors use individualized lesson plans, generated by the classroom teacher using HOSTS software, to reinforce needed skills with students. The teacher monitors progress with diagnostic assessments. This program can be used at all grade levels.

Implementing supplementary reading activities, such as the ones described above, is just one option available to principals looking to strengthen their reading programs.

Tutor-based Programs

Other approaches use same-age peers, older students, instructional aides, parents, or others as volunteer tutors, often in an attempt to avoid the higher costs associated with formal reading programs. Although well-trained and well-supported volunteers can be valuable assets for schools and the children they serve, some research cautions against using volunteer tutors to provide remedial help for students with severe reading difficulties (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998). And one guiding principle should be considered paramount: none of the tutoring opportunities should serve as a substitute for instruction from a highly trained teacher.

Schools interested in developing tutor-based programs should incorporate these research-based elements in their design and selection, including:

- a certified reading specialist to assess children's reading skills and needs, develop lesson plans, observe tutors, and provide them with feedback and support;
- ongoing training for and feedback from tutors;
- structured tutoring sessions that contain opportunities for rereading familiar text, word analysis, writing, and introduction of new stories;
- tutoring that is intensive and consistent (a minimum of one and one-half to two hours each week, working with the same tutor);
- ongoing assessment of students to help tailor lesson content to the needs of the individual child; and
- coordination of tutoring with classroom instruction (Wasik 1998, 565-569).

If you decide that a volunteer-based reading tutoring program holds promise for the children of your school or school district, you can create the best chances for positive results through careful planning. Koralek and Collins (1997) outline an eight-step approach, which suggests questions that schools and districts should ask themselves while planning a volunteer-based reading tutorial program.

- *Assess the need.* How many students are experiencing reading difficulties or need extra help? What services are already available to serve these students?
- *Define the mission.* What does the program intend to do? Do you want the program to simply provide an opportunity for students to read with an adult "buddy"? Or do you view the program as a time during which students can practice specific skills?
- *Set goals and objectives.* These goals should be used to provide direction for the structure and content of tutoring sessions, training for the volunteers, etc.
- *Create tutoring program partnerships.* For example, local service organizations may have members who are looking for volunteer opportunities. Or, for a school interested in recruiting tutors on an individual basis, plans for recruiting volunteers should be developed.
- *Design the program.* Which children will be served? How will they be identified? When and where will the tutoring take place? How will the program support the tutors? Will the program include opportunities for teacher-tutor communication? How will the effectiveness of the program be assessed?
- *Select or adapt a "reading curriculum."* For schools, this might involve designing content for the tutoring sessions that supports the current reading program or, alternately, involves volunteers to engage students in reading for enjoyment.

- *Provide support* such as an orientation, training, ongoing supervision, and materials for tutors.
- *Implement the plans.*

Book Buddies

Originally developed, initiated, and coordinated by the McGuffey Reading Center at the University of Virginia, Book Buddies is a one-on-one community volunteer program that aims to ensure that all first- and second-grade students learn to read and write. Book Buddies volunteers receive training in literacy development and work with students on such skills as rereading for fluency, word study, writing, and reading new materials. The on-site coordinator at each participating elementary school matches students with volunteers and ensures coordination and communication with classroom teachers. Students are chosen for the program on the basis of their scores on the Virginia PALS assessment and teacher recommendation. In most cases, tutoring sessions take place in a Book Buddies room at each school.

The concept of the Book Buddies program is growing in popularity, and other states and districts are now developing similar programs. More information on the Book Buddies program is available online at curry.edschool.virginia.edu/curry/dept/cise/read/resources/bookbuddies/what.html.

Reading at the Upper Elementary and Middle School Levels

Reading materials used in the upper elementary grades often differ markedly from the reading texts used in the lower grades. Wilson describes some critically important differences between what is expected of early grade readers and those in the upper elementary and middle school grades:

> By the time students reach middle school...they are expected to have the comprehension skills necessary to read in the content areas. Reading in a content area poses new challenges to the...student.... [because] reading becomes a tool for gathering information about a subject area.

> In addition, the reading material required of middle school...students becomes more difficult. Gone are the short stories filled with vivid characters and familiar topics that were the basis of the elementary reading program (1999, 2).

Students must be taught certain strategies for reading their texts—particularly useful are metacognitive strategies that help them retain, comprehend, and apply the material they are reading. The following strategies can be modified for use with students of all levels and in all types of classes:

- Set a purpose for reading.
- Think about what you already know about the topic and apply it to the text.
- Scan material before reading.
- Use text features (such as titles, bold print, italics, pictures, graphs) to predict what the reading will be about.
- Predict what will happen next.
- Recall background knowledge.
- Determine the genre of the text.
- Look for characters, settings, problems, and problem solutions.
- Summarize main ideas.
- Make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.
- Stop periodically to summarize what has been read and how it connects with previous paragraphs.
- Monitor your own understanding.
- Make charts, webs, outlines, record reactions (Learning First Alliance 1998; Rose 2000).

Although many of the strategies used with younger readers can be used with older students as well, there are some issues unique to middle school reading that teachers of these students need to consider. For example, while the type of text typically presented in the elementary grades allows many weak readers to guess most words in context successfully, the percentage of unknown words in much content-area reading takes them past the "'break point' in reading, a point at which contextual guessing is no longer effective" (Greene 1998).

Although dealing with reading problems is more difficult with older students, there have been approaches developed for use in the regular classroom that have demonstrated success in helping these students. Three of these are provided here as examples.

Embedding Reading Instruction in Content-Area Instruction

Some content area teachers may feel that embedding "reading instruction" into their classes would be difficult. Here are some examples of how this can be done in mathematics classes:

- When presenting students with word problems, ask them for definitions of key terms and interpretations of important phrases.
- Ask students to rephrase a complicated word problem in their own words, perhaps breaking the problem down into a series of simple sentences.
- Use the technique of thinking aloud to model how one might interpret a problem and go about solving it.
- Ask students to keep a math journal, writing out definitions or exploring concepts.
- Increase interest and motivation for reading mathematical language by encouraging recreational reading of materials with high math content, such as earned run averages in baseball and statistical information from surveys.

Source: Wilson 1999.

- **Reading for Understanding**
  - Uses a "reading apprenticeship approach" in which teachers explicitly "recognize" what they do to read and communicate these behaviors to students. As a result, students learn to be more conscious of their own reading processes and become better readers within specific content areas.
  - Focuses on developing metacognitive skills and teaching students to be "self-reflective" about their reading processes (WestEd 1999).
- **Talking about Texts**
  - Occurs in a small group discussion format.
  - Aims to improve comprehension.

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- Through discussions with group members, makes students aware that some questions have multiple answers and that individuals often interpret text differently.
- Uses flexible, heterogeneous groups with between four and eight members (Murphy 1998).

▹ **Reading Apprenticeship**

- Occurs through class discussions, small group meetings, individual sessions, and journal entries.
- Aims to help students become better readers of a variety of texts by helping students gain insight into their own reading processes and stressing the need for metacognitive conversation.
- Teaches students strategies for reading and encourages them to "talk through" their reading of texts.
- Takes place in the process of teaching subject area content, rather than as an instructional add-on (Greenleaf et al. 2001).

Increasing the quantity and quality of reading experiences can also serve to motivate students, as they are likely to find texts they enjoy reading and topics that interest them. As with younger students, teachers need to ensure that the texts students are reading are appropriate for their independent reading level and that this instruction is supplemented with "supported" reading of more challenging material (Learning First Alliance 1998).

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 6
Observing and Evaluating Reading Instruction: The Principal's Role

Earlier in this publication, we discussed the importance of good teaching to effective reading instruction. As stated earlier, effective teachers of reading are not only knowledgeable about early literacy development and instructional practices, but also highly competent classroom managers. They hold high expectations for their students and have in place a series of procedures and routines for all classroom activities. Because students know what is expected of them and have been taught to work independently, the teacher is able to work with small groups or individual students to provide each student with reading instruction tailored to his/her needs.

The teaching of reading is a complex process, often complicated by some of these factors:

1. Children's reading development goes through several stages, with the instructional emphasis changing somewhat in each stage. Thus, a credible reading lesson for an "on-level" second grader will often differ from a good reading lesson for a "below-level" peer.
2. Obtaining appropriate reading materials is far more complicated than simply having all second graders read from second-grade basal material.
3. Reading instruction that moves both at-risk and well-prepared children forward on the literacy continuum will differ, especially in the initial stages (Griffin 1997, 1).

The complexity of this process also creates challenges for you as the principal in your role as an evaluator of teacher performance. What should you be looking for when you observe reading instruction? The checklist on the following pages gives some guidance by listing what is required for effective reading instruction at each stage of reading development.

What to Look for in Effective Reading Instruction

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

- ✔ Do you see children engaged in "writing-like" and "reading-like" experiences, such as "scribble writing" or rereading favorite books and poems from memory?
- ✔ Does the teacher develop awareness of phonemes (the sounds of language) by using and talking about rhyme, or helping children identify matching initial sounds, such as "mom" and "monster"?
- ✔ Do children hear many stories every day and take delight in story time?
- ✔ Does the teacher write down the language of children dictating stories both individually and in a group?
- ✔ Does the teacher create high interest in written language and literature? For example, do children ask, "What does that say?" or "Can you read me a story?"
- ✔ Are many books available for children to read or have read to them?

First Grade

- ✔ Are children spending more time each day reading whole texts than receiving reading instruction?
- ✔ Do they read narrative stories and expository texts, rather than isolated sentences or words on a worksheet?
- ✔ Is instruction given on using multiple strategies to unlock unknown words in the text, such as using phonics or familiar word chunks (-ay as in "play" or -and as in "sand")?
- ✔ Is instruction given about self-monitoring during reading, so that children can independently detect and correct their errors?
- ✔ Is instruction given about using illustrations and prior experience to make sense of the text?
- ✔ Do the children write every day (more than filling in blanks)?
- ✔ When a child makes an error while reading aloud, do the teacher and other students give the reader time to figure out the word?
- ✔ Are the children reading text at their appropriate reading levels? If some children are missing many words as they read aloud, they may be reading at the wrong level. This is often the case when all the children in the class are reading the same book.
- ✔ Are the lowest-achieving children receiving the most instructional time and support in reading, and are they spending as much or more time reading whole texts as high-achieving children?

Second and Third Grade

- ✔ Does the teacher activate children's prior knowledge before reading and help them make predictions about the text?
- ✔ Is the teacher's primary focus on reading comprehension and enjoyment?
- ✔ Are children who are still reading at a first-grade level being given appropriate instruction?
- ✔ Are children given instruction in decoding unknown "long" words?
- ✔ Are all children reading at their level, as evidenced by the variety of reading levels in the material being used?

What to Look for in Effective Reading Instruction (continued)

- ✔ Are large blocks of classroom time spent reading whole texts, not just worksheets and basal material?
- ✔ Is there a classroom library available to the children for recreational reading, and is it used daily?
- ✔ Is the teacher continually finding ways to build vocabulary?
- ✔ Do the children write every day?

Fourth and Fifth Grade

- ✔ Are children given strategies that help them comprehend informational or expository text, such as graphic organizers to show relationships between ideas?
- ✔ Is the teacher taking every opportunity to build vocabulary in the content areas by using a variety of techniques like semantic mapping?
- ✔ Does the teacher model or demonstrate comprehension strategies, for example, by demonstrating the thought process by which one finds the main idea of a passage?
- ✔ Does the teacher give children specific ways to "fix" comprehension when it falters, for example, by encouraging them to reread or "read on" for understanding?
- ✔ Is almost all reading done silently, followed by discussion that is not just questioning?
- ✔ Are children reading material at their appropriate levels and do they have large blocks of classroom time to do so? By the fourth and fifth grades, children should be past the "learning to read" stage and solidly into the "reading to learn" stage.
- ✔ Are those children who still are struggling with reading being given suitable reading material and instruction from a lower level?
- ✔ Do children write and revise/edit daily?

Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Grade

- ✔ Does the teacher teach students to keep track of whether or not they understand the material?
- ✔ Does the teacher show students how to "read to learn" by demonstrating reading strategies?
- ✔ Are students asked to make and test predictions about a reading?
- ✔ Does the teacher assist students in applying their prior knowledge before and during a reading?
- ✔ Does the teacher model the use of graphic organizers for comprehension purposes?
- ✔ Are students encouraged to create their own vocabulary list of new words they have learned?
- ✔ Are students reading material appropriate for their reading level? Are children who are reading at a lower level being given suitable material and instruction at a lower level?
- ✔ Are students encouraged to discuss and debate their ideas or reactions to a reading?

Source: Sharon F. Griffin. 1997. "Observing Reading Instruction: A Guide for Principals." *Here's How* (September 1997): 1-4.

Although most of these questions can be answered through observations, it may be necessary to make multiple observations at different times of the day to obtain a complete picture of the nature of reading instruction in a particular classroom. Teacher interviews can fill in "gaps" in information that may not be readily observable on any particular day. During these interviews, ask the teacher to explain his/her assessment system, including how "real data" is collected on each child. A teacher should also be able to describe the literacy needs of each of the children in his/her classroom and provide documentation of each child's performance and progress (Griffin 1997, 3).

According to Griffin, "the one constant of effective reading programs across all grade levels of elementary schools is that students spend large amounts of time reading 'real' text and not just instructional materials, such as worksheets" (1997, 4). During observations, or visits to classrooms, take a moment to look around the classroom at the types of reading materials available to students. What types of books are on the bookcases? Are the books representative of a variety of genres? Is student work on display on the walls? Are there magazines? Are there charts or posters displayed around the room? Do students have workbooks or Basal readers? Are there piles of worksheets? A classroom visit should leave you with the feeling that students are immersed in good literature and that the majority of classroom time is spent reading rather than learning to read.

Working with Teachers to Improve Their Reading Instruction

The primary objective of teacher observation is to ensure that students are receiving high-quality, effective instruction in a safe and supportive environment. Principals should be viewed as instructional leaders, or as individuals to whom teachers can turn for instructional guidance and support. In order to conduct effective observations that provide constructive feedback for the teacher and to fulfill their role as instructional leaders, principals must have an understanding of how children learn to read.

Principals who understand the reading process and the characteristics of effective instruction are well-equipped to conduct informed observations and provide constructive feedback and suggestions to teachers who may be in need of improvement. During all conferences, it is important to remain supportive of the teacher's efforts and to provide rationalizations for specific suggestions. Understand that change takes time and that immediate improvement may not be forthcoming.

The following are suggestions for ways in which you as the principal can work with teachers to improve their methods for teaching reading.

- Facilitate the development of a schedule that allows for peer observations. Encourage teachers at the same grade level to observe reading lessons in each other's classrooms. There is much to be learned from watching others teach, and then discussing what was observed. Also, teachers who are in need of support may find peer observations less threatening than administrator observations.

- Provide staff development offerings, such as workshops or seminars, in needed areas. For example, if you begin to notice that many teachers are not able to adequately monitor student progress, you might organize a staff development session on methods of literacy assessment.
- Ask the reading specialist or reading teacher to observe a reading lesson in the teacher's classroom and provide constructive feedback and ideas for improvement. The reading specialist or reading teacher could also teach a lesson to the teacher's class, which the teacher observes.
- Videotape the teacher teaching a reading lesson or series of lessons, and then watch and critique the video together.
- Provide the teacher with a list of resources, such as books or Internet sites to which the teacher can refer for lesson ideas, instructional strategies, or topical information.

As you observe teachers and talk with them about their reading instruction, you will learn much about their strengths, weaknesses, and comfort level with certain materials and instructional practices. Teacher observations are scheduled, among other reasons, to help teachers become better at the "craft" of teaching. Staff development offerings, discussed in the following section of this publication, are another way to help teachers develop their knowledge and skills.

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 7
Educating and Supporting Teachers

Elementary and middle school leaders who want to raise reading achievement—and with it, achievement in the content areas—must commit themselves to developing support systems for teachers as they work toward continuously improving their reading-related teaching skills. High-quality staff development is a critical first step.

In the past, many schools relied on the preservice instruction teachers received or the manual that accompanied the textbook series to provide the information and training teachers needed to become high-quality teachers of reading. However, the number of children who experienced reading-related difficulties—along with the emergence of research that highlighted how complex the process of learning to read really is—pointed to the need for schools to provide additional professional training for teachers.

Participation in professional development about reading instruction should help teachers better assess the strengths and weaknesses of their students and teach them how to use this information to inform instruction.

In general, staff development in reading for K-8 educators should:

- Convey and ensure a common understanding among teachers and administrators about what "good" reading instruction looks like.
- Assist teachers in learning how to develop coordinated plans to address problems of individual students before they fall too far behind.
- Facilitate discussion on what constitutes "good teaching" in the area of reading instruction and train teachers in these methods.
- Provide a setting in which all teachers—regular education, special education, reading specialists, ESL teachers, etc.—can get together and discuss reading instruction so that it is addressed in a coordinated fashion.
- Train teachers and administrators in the use of effective reading instruction techniques.

Professional development offerings should vary in content, form, and method of presentation. Just like students, teachers also have different learning styles and appreciate variety in format and presentation method. Options include study groups, collaborative teams, individual projects, peer observations, demonstrations, apprenticeships, classroom research projects, observations and feedback from those who are more expert, and pilot programs. Offering a variety of professional development activities will meet individual needs better than a "one-size-fits-all" approach (Learning First Alliance 2000).

What Kind of Professional Development in Reading Instruction Do Teachers Need?

Teaching children to read is a complex task. In order to accomplish this task successfully, teachers need a thorough understanding of the following components of effective reading instruction:

- phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and concepts of print;
- the alphabetic code (phonics and decoding);
- fluent, automatic reading of text;
- vocabulary;
- text comprehension;
- written expression;
- spelling and handwriting;
- motivation to read and developing literacy horizons (Learning First Alliance 2000).

In addition, teachers need training in literacy assessment and using data to inform instruction. The information gleaned from these assessments can aid teachers in developing goals for student achievement. These goals for student learning should, in turn, ultimately drive the professional development process.

The Learning First Alliance publication *Every Child Reading: A Professional Development Guide* explicitly states the teacher knowledge, teacher skills, and some recommended professional development experiences for each of the components of effective reading instruction listed above.

The tables in the Learning First Alliance publication are a great resource for principals striving to identify the areas in which professional development may be needed. They can be located online at www.learningfirst.org/readingguide.html. When viewing these tables, think of the skill being addressed as the goal for student learning and the necessary teacher knowledge and skills as the information teachers must have to help students attain these goals.

The Context for Professional Development

Teachers are more likely to improve student achievement in reading when these conditions prevail:

- *Everyone who affects student learning is involved.* It is largely ineffective to educate classroom teachers about early reading instruction unless administrators, specialists, teaching assistants, tutors, and parents operate with similar concepts and practices.
- *Student standards, curricular frameworks, textbooks, instructional programs, and assessments are closely aligned with one another.* When academic standards, curricular frameworks, textbooks, instructional programs, and assessments are aligned, teachers can more readily commit effort and resources to implementing them.
- *Professional development is given adequate time and takes place in school as part of the work day.* Teaching children how to read and write is a complex activity that is learned with knowledge, coaching, and experience. Because teachers are professionals who do more than manage a room full of students, they need time to reflect on the success of their lessons with others who are working toward similar goals.
- *The expertise of colleagues, mentors, and outside experts is accessible and engaged as often as necessary in professional development programs.* Positive school-wide change requires collaboration of faculty, administration, and community toward a commonly held vision. Regular (weekly to bimonthly) collaborations with grade level teams, specialists, and facilitators can be seminars in curriculum development, interpretation of student assessments, or acquisition of teaching skill.
- *Strong instructional leadership is present.* Vocal and visible commitment from building administrators is necessary to support improvement of reading instruction. These leaders must also cultivate school board and community support for specific goals and practices in literacy instruction.
- There is commitment to a long-range plan with adequate funding. Preparation for change, change itself, and institutionalization of change in teaching practices may take three to five years. Short-term solutions to long-term challenges will not work.

Source: Learning First Alliance. 2000.

Leadership Roles in Professional Development

Phases	School Administrator's Role	Teacher's Role
Building a knowledge base	To provide an environment rich of opportunities for personal and professional growth	To take advantage of the opportunity to participate in those activities provided by the school
Observing models and examples	To create a nurturing climate whereby teachers are able to observe, model, and share expertise	To be willing to share their expertise through modeling, providing examples, and best teaching practices
Reflecting on your own practice	To reflect on his/her own instructional and administrative decision making processes that affect the academic and personal well-being of all stakeholders	To reflect on his/her own instructional practices as they relate to the academic growth and personal well-being of students
Changing your practice	To assess the processes that have determined the academic, professional, and personal changes related to systemic change	To assess his/her instructional practices and make the necessary changes for a more effective learning environment
Gaining and sharing expertise	To apply the knowledge, maintain the learning environment, and expand the possibilities	To apply the knowledge, maintain the academic growth, and expand the possibilities

Source: Riggs and Gil-Garcia 2001.

Leading the Staff Development Process: The Principal

Recent research studies on effective organizational leadership, in both the educational and corporate arenas, have provided unusually consistent findings that offer important guidance for principals who want to promote and support change at the classroom level (Sergiovanni 1999; Bolman and Deal 1991). Collectively, these studies of new leadership approaches focus on the needs to: emphasize instructional leadership; develop organizational cultures that promote innovation and experimentation rather than

risk reduction through inaction; support increased autonomy and empowerment of people throughout the organization; change reward structures; and, perhaps most importantly, focus more on establishing broad-based, proactive consensus around a clear and consistent vision of the organization's mission and purpose.

The effective school principal recognizes the key part that staff development must play in developing a learning-focused, high-achieving school. He or she takes the lead in ensuring that teachers are provided with staff development that provides opportunities to build a knowledge base; observe models and examples; reflect on one's own practice; change one's own practice; and gain and share expertise.

In this model of staff development, illustrated on page 64, both the principal and teachers play an active role. Together, education leaders create a staff development program that is collaborative, authentic, reflective, and, perhaps most important, is designed to speak to student learning needs.

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 8
Working with Families

The importance of families in student achievement in school depends not on income or social status, but on the extent to which the family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning, express high (but realistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (School-Home Links 2001).

Parents are their children's earliest teachers, and, as such, are in a prime position to have an important influence on their children's literacy development. For that reason, it is crucial for schools to form strong relationships with families. Frequent, constructive communication between teachers and parents lays the foundation for parental support outside of school.

Approaches to Encourage Family Involvement

One way that schools can facilitate communication with families is by sponsoring informational or training sessions for parents on home reading activities. During these sessions, parents receive information on how they can support and encourage their child's reading development. Topics of training sessions might include reading aloud to children, posing questions to aid in comprehension and metacognitive development, and helping children develop "word attack" strategies.

In addition, it is important for teachers to communicate their expectations for students to parents. Parents often appreciate knowing the standards to which students will be held and the expectations for their child's development over the course of the school year. Similarly, teachers should be certain to explicitly explain procedures for homework, checking books out of the library, and special projects to parents to make familial involvement in these activities as easy as possible.

An easy way to accomplish this, and to keep parents informed, is by sending home a periodic newsletter. At the beginning of the year, the first-grade newsletter might

Benefits of Strong Home-School Partnerships

Teachers benefit through:

- Better understanding of parent expectations and closer communication with parents
- Increased rate of return on homework and greater family involvement in home learning activities
- Increased parental support and cooperation

Administrators benefit through:

- Better communication between school and home
- Fewer parent complaints about inconsistent and inappropriate homework
- Better use of limited resources to link home and school
- Improved school climate when children see parents and teachers working as partners

Parents benefit through:

- Opportunity to become partners with teachers and to shape important decisions that enhance their children's success
- Consistent expectations, practices, and messages about homework and home-learning activities
- Increased opportunities to engage in home-learning activities with children
- Access to schoolwide resources such as parent learning centers, homework hotlines, homework centers, parent workshops, and home visits

Students benefit through:

- More positive attitudes towards school
- Higher achievement in reading
- Better and more grade-appropriate homework assignments
- Completion of more homework assignments because of greater parental interest and support
- Greater consistency between family and school goals

Sources: Epstein 1991, 1992; Henderson 1987; Liontos 1992; Moles and D'Angelo 1993.

Online Resource to Inform Parents

Recognizing the importance of parental involvement in literacy development, the Texas Education Agency published *Beginning Reading Instruction: A Practical Guide for Parents.* Designed as a companion piece to its publication, *Beginning Reading Instruction: Components and Features of a Research-Based Reading Program,* this guide provides information about learning to read and includes activities parents can use to help their children become readers. Some suggestions provided in the *Guide* are:

- Post on the refrigerator or home bulletin board a list of the books and stories your children have read.
- Make audio or video tapes of your children reading and send them to their grandparents or other family members.
- As you read with your children, show them that reading aloud should sound like talking.
- Have your children read a new story; then ask them to tell you the story in their own words. Have them tell the story in which it happened.

Source: Texas Education Agency 1997.

contain a literacy development timeline and brief outline of skills students are expected to master by the end of each academic quarter to remain "on grade level." Procedures for using the school library can also be included, as well as tips for helping children with their homework. Regular updates can provide information on the books being read in class, special projects, and upcoming events.

Back-to-school nights and parent-teacher conferences can provide another forum for conveying information on the reading program to parents. During conferences, teachers can show parents examples of their child's writing, results of assessment measures (such as running records, observational notes), and the books their child is reading in class. Back-to-school night serves as an ideal opportunity for teachers to give parents a "tour" of the room and its literacy materials and to explain the reading program to parents. Seeing the materials used first hand—such as magnetic alphabet letters, books-on-tape, and big books—will help parents to understand the school's orientation towards reading instruction and may give parents ideas for reading activities they can do with their child.

In order to support a home-school partnership, the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) has developed a pamphlet entitled "Ten Tips for Parents: Raising Good Readers." An excerpted version of this pamphlet is provided in Appendix D, along with several other checklists that may be used as handouts for parents.

Role of the Principal

It would be hard to find a principal who does not speak positively of the relationship between family involvement and school improvement. But talking about the importance of working closely with families does not always translate into implementation, commitment, and resource allocation.

It cannot be stressed enough that strong support for making the family-school partnership a priority needs to come from the school leader. When administrators make it clear that family involvement is important, teachers are more likely to use family involvement strategies.

Moreover, for family involvement efforts to be successful, they must be made a school priority. Transforming the school into an institution that treats families as partners in the students' education will take time, and the effort will not always go smoothly. The principal who leads family involvement efforts in the school will need to monitor and nurture the effort continuously.

Above all, schools, under the leadership of principals, possess the primary responsibility for initiating school-family partnerships. Schools should invest in professional development that supports family involvement, create time for staff to work with parents, supply necessary resources, design innovative strategies to meet the needs of diverse families, and provide useful information to families on how they can contribute to their children's learning (Funkhouser and Gonzales 1997).

Learn to communicate better.

At times, parents feel that educators talk down to them or speak in educational jargon they do not understand. School signs often seem unwelcoming. Schools should make every effort to reach out and communicate with parents in a clear way and listen to what they have to say. To ensure that all parents have access to information, written material should be concise and easily readable. Schools should be parent-friendly. Some school newsletters for parents include a glossary of terms to help parents understand school improvement efforts. Some schools use regularly scheduled telephone calls to stay in contact with families.

Encourage parental participation in school improvement efforts.

When schools develop improvement plans, families ought to be included at every stage of the process to get their input and to give them a sense of shared responsibility. Many schools, supported by the new Goals 2000: Educate America Act, are now developing such plans. They are working to raise academic standards, improve teaching, make schools safer, introduce computers and other learning technologies into the classroom, and to make many other vitally needed changes. The full involvement of parents and other members of the community is instrumental to the success of these efforts.

Involve parents in decision making.

Schools can give parents a more effective voice by opening up the school governance process so that more parents can participate. Many schools hold evening and weekend meetings and conferences to accommodate families' work schedules.

Give teachers the tools to reach out to families.

Staff development can help teachers to understand the benefits of family involvement and show them how to remove barriers to involvement. It can also explain techniques for improving two-way communication between home and schools, and suggest ways to help meet families' overall educational needs.

Make parents feel welcome.

Often the first time a parent comes to school is when a child is in trouble. Schools can help reduce tensions by making initial contacts with parents friendly and respectful. Schools can also reduce distrust by arranging contacts in neutral settings off school grounds. Home visits by family liaison personnel can be particularly helpful. Some programs have used home-school coordinators to run weekly clubs for parents, helping to build parenting skills and trust between

Partners in Learning: How Schools Can Support Family Involvement in Education (continued)

families and schools. Schools might also encourage parents, teachers, and students to meet at the beginning of the school year to agree on goals and develop a common understanding.

Overcome language barriers.

Reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special accommodations. Translating materials into a parent's first language helps, but written communication alone is not enough. Ideally, a resource person, perhaps another parent, should be available to communicate with parents in their first language. Interactive telephone voice-mail systems that have bilingual recordings for families are also useful. In addition, English-as-a-second-language classes for parents and grandparents may be helpful.

Use technology to link parents to the classroom.

Educators can creatively use new technology—from voice mail, to homework hotlines, to educational cd-rom programs—to get parents more involved in the learning process. For example, voice mail systems have been installed in several hundred schools across the country. Parents and students can call for taped messages that describe classroom activities and daily homework assignments. Audiotapes and videotapes can also be used to enhance communication with parents. These are especially helpful in reaching family members who do not read. Even with all the new technology, teachers and other school staff can still use the old telephone to connect with parents. Schools can help by providing teachers with classroom phones.

Encourage communities to join school-family partnerships.

This can be especially effective in reducing school safety problems that are connected to problems in surrounding neighborhoods. Parents, community residents, and law enforcement officials can help by joining together in voluntary organizations, friendship networks, and neighborhood watches to solve common problems. Schools and community and religious organizations can help by offering after-school cultural and recreational activities. Community-supported student services have also succeeded when families, schools, and community representatives have made the effort to get involved.

Source: Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. 1998. *Partners in Learning: How Schools Can Support Family Involvment in Education.* Online: www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/schools.html

Notes, Reminders, and Ideas:

Section 9
Moving Ahead with Your School's Efforts to Improve Reading Instruction

The standards and accountability movement has had a dramatic impact on all levels of American education. In schools and classrooms across the country, educators are working to raise the achievement of all students to ever-higher levels.

By providing teachers with solid information on high-quality, effective literacy instruction, school leaders at the elementary and middle school level can help to develop a literacy program that better meets the needs of *all* students. And, as an added bonus, schools that have actively incorporated reading instruction into the total school culture, rather than limiting it to reading or language arts periods, find that student achievement increases in the content areas as well.

The development of an effective reading program requires a coordinated effort to pull together the "essential elements" of embedded reading instruction, curriculum alignment, balanced literacy, ongoing assessment, additional assistance, and staff development .

A key part of this process is reviewing all the pieces from a district or schoolwide perspective. The initial self-study should focus on these questions:

- Is our approach to teaching reading in the early grades balanced and researched-based? Has it been effectively communicated to all staff so that what is intended is actually what is taught?
- Are the curriculum and instructional methods used well-integrated and cohesive across the grades?
- Are we providing enough instructional time for students in general for reading and language arts?
- Do we have a comprehensive and ongoing approach to identifying struggling readers and their specific problems—one that ensures that no student will be

overlooked for so long that he or she has little chance of catching up?

- Do we have a system developed for intervening and providing intensive support for struggling readers that uses a variety of approaches (tutoring, after-school, regrouping by reading ability, etc.) and that provides more reading instruction and time for these students?
- Is staff development and other support available for teachers so that, for example, they know how to recognize signs of reading difficulty, can use assessment data to help direct instruction, and understand how to teach specific concepts such as phonemic awareness?
- Have discussions, staff development, etc., been used to help content-area teachers realize the importance of addressing the needs of struggling readers in their classes and to provide them with ways to do this effectively?
- Is time available for teachers to collaborate to problem solve, share successful approaches, and discuss how to provide assistance for struggling readers?

As the instructional school leader, the principal must support the efforts of all teachers to promote students' reading skills. Principals can help by providing resources and time for teachers to build their skills, to discuss what works, and to collaborate in a schoolwide effort to increase the ability of all students to read and comprehend what they read.

There are many programs and practices principals can implement to improve and foster reading achievement. Although some are easier and less time-intensive than others, all contribute to the overall goal: establishing and maintaining a high-quality reading program. The following is a brief list of suggestions that can be implemented immediately to raise reading achievement.

1. **Articulate your curriculum and instruction.**
   - All teachers in the school should be using the same vocabulary, employing similar methods of instruction, and teaching cognitive strategies schoolwide so that students can build on their learning from grade to grade.
   - All teachers at the same grade level should coordinate their instructional efforts to ensure that each student gets comparable reading instruction.
   - Make sure that teachers have a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in their grade level as well as all others.
2. **Read aloud every day.**
   - Every teacher in every classroom should be reading aloud to every student every day. In primary classrooms, reading aloud will occur more frequently and may be a centerpiece of instruction. In upper grades, the read-aloud

period might be less structured.

3. **Turn off the TV and turn on to books.**

   - Organize a reading program that focuses on encouraging students to use free time at home to read rather than to watch television.

4. **Use Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything And Read (DEAR).**

   - These two programs have all students in a school reading silently for a certain period of time every day. In some schools, everyone stops to read at the same time, while in other schools the silent reading time is scheduled on a classroom-to-classroom basis.

5. **Check it out.**

   - The school librarian or media specialist should be an expert in matching books and kids. He or she should work closely with teachers to be aware of special needs a student may have.

6. **Create classroom libraries and reading corners.**

   - Make sure that teachers have budgets to purchase paperback books for their classrooms and encourage them to establish reading corners where students can relax while they read.

7. **Invite an author.**

   - There's nothing like the presence of a "real" author to motivate students to read. Hold a book fair in conjunction with the author's visit to sell his/her books as well as others.

8. **Set real reading goals.**

   - Decide as a faculty that you will raise reading achievement and set a measurable goal (e.g., reduce the number of students in the bottom quartile by 10%). Share this goal with the superintendent and ask him/her what contributions the central office can make to reaching this goal. Share the goal with parents also and ask them what they will be willing to do to help.

9. **Observe reading instruction daily.**

   - Observe reading instruction at some grade level every single day of the school year. You should be aware of the students who are having difficulties. You should regularly affirm those teachers who are effective and regularly assist

those who are having difficulties.

10. Read about reading, talk about reading, do reading.

- Conduct your own self-study program about reading instruction. Become an expert. Tutor a child to find out how challenging reading instruction can be. Teach your teachers. Engage them in meaningful dialogue and discussion about the reading process (McEwan 1998).

These 10 suggestions are just examples of ways in which principals, through assertive leadership, can guide their schools in the process of developing and maintaining high-quality reading programs. As the principal, you can set the tone by modeling enthusiam for reading, and encourage staff to try new ways of working with struggling readers, communicating with parents, and encouraging a love of reading in each student. Your role is also key in providing staff with time, resources, and training to work together to help every student become a proficient reader.

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Appendix A: Suggested Books for Children

The following lists can help educators and parents provide a rich variety of reading materials that will engage children and help them develop their reading skills.

Newbery Award-Winning Books

The Newbery Medal has been presented annually since 1922 to an American author who makes the most distinguished contribution to children's literature. Book title, author and publisher, and year of the award are listed below for books receiving the honor between 1985 and 2001. A complete listing of Newbery Award-Winning books can be found online at www.ala.org/alsc/nquick.html.

2001: ***A Year Down Yonder*** by Richard Peck (Dial)

2000: ***Bud, Not Buddy*** by Christopher Paul Curtis (Delacorte)

1999: ***Holes*** by Louis Sachar (Frances Foster)

1998: ***Out of the Dust*** by Karen Hesse (Scholastic)

1997: ***The View from Saturday*** by E.L. Konigsburg (Jean Karl/Atheneum)

1996: ***The Midwife's Apprentice*** by Karen Cushman (Clarion)

1995: ***Walk Two Moons*** by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins)

1994: ***The Giver*** by Lois Lowry (Houghton)

1993: ***Missing May*** by Cynthia Rylant (Jackson/Orchard)

1992: ***Shiloh*** by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (Atheneum)

1991: ***Maniac Magee*** by Jerry Spinelli (Little, Brown)

1990: ***Number the Stars*** by Lois Lowry (Houghton)

1989: ***Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*** by Paul Fleischman (Harper)

1988: ***Lincoln: A Photobiography*** by Russell Freedman (Clarion)

1987: ***The Whipping Boy*** by Sid Fleischman (Greenwillow)

1986: ***Sarah, Plain and Tall*** by Patricia MacLachlan (Harper)

1985: ***The Hero and the Crown*** by Robin McKinley (Greenwillow)

Caldecott Award-Winning Books

Each year, since 1938, the Caldecott Medal is presented to the illustrator of the most distinguished American picture book for children published in the United States. Book title, illustrator and publisher, and year of award are listed below for titles receiving the award between 1985 and 2001. A complete listing of Caldecott Award winning books is available online at www.ala.org/alsc/cquick.html.

2001: ***So You Want to Be President?*** illustrated by David Small; text by Judith St. George (Philomel Books)

2000: ***Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*** by Simms Taback (Viking)

1999: ***Snowflake Bentley*** illustrated by Mary Azarian; text by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (Houghton)

1998: ***Rapunzel*** by Paul O. Zelinsky (Dutton)

1997: ***Golem*** by David Wisniewski (Clarion)

1996: ***Officer Buckle and Gloria*** by Peggy Rathmann (Putnam)

1995: ***Smoky Night*** illustrated by David Diaz; text by Eve Bunting (Harcourt)

1994: ***Grandfather's Journey*** by Allen Say; text edited by Walter Lorraine (Houghton)

1993: ***Mirette on the High Wire*** by Emily Arnold McCully (Putnam)

1992: ***Tuesday*** by David Wiesner (Clarion Books)

1991: ***Black and White*** by David Macaulay (Houghton)

1990: ***Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China*** by Ed Young (Philomel)

1989: ***Song and Dance Man*** illustrated by Stephen Gammell; text by Karen Ackerman (Knopf)

1988: ***Owl Moon*** illustrated by John Schoenherr; text by Jane Yolen (Philomel)

1987: ***Hey, Al*** illustrated by Richard Egielski; text by Arthur Yorinks (Farrar)

1986: ***The Polar Express*** by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton)

1985: ***Saint George and the Dragon*** illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman;

text retold by Margaret Hodges (Little, Brown)

Notable Books for Children 2001

Each year the Smithsonian compiles a list of the most notable children's books published during the year. Below are some of those chosen by the Smithsonian for 2001. The complete list can be found online at www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues01/nov01/book_review.html.

Notable Books for Children Ages 6-10

Rocks in His Head by Carol Otis Hurst, illustrated by James Stevenson (Harper Collins)

A Gift from Zeus by Jeanne Steig, illustrated by William Steig (Harper Collins)

Journey into the Rainforest by Tim Knight, photographs by Juan Pablo Moreiras and Tim Knight (Oxford University Press)

Is My Friend at Home? Pueblo Fireside Tales retold by John Bierhorst, illustrated by Wendy Watson (Farrar Straus Giroux)

One Day at Wood Green Animal Shelter by Patricia Casey (Candlewick)

The Journey by Sarah Stewart, illustrated by David Small (Farrar Straus Giroux)

The Beastly Arms by Patrick Jennings (Scholastic)

The Lamp, the Ice, and the Boat Called Fish by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, illustrated by Beth Krommes (Houghton Mifflin)

Everything on a Waffle by Polly Horvath (Farrar Straus Giroux)

Missing from Haymarket Square by Harriette Gillem Robinet (Atheneum)

Traveling Man by James Rumford (Houghton Mifflin)

Fannie in the Kitchen by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter (Simon & Schuster)

A Dragon in the Sky by Laurence Pringle, illustrated by Bob Marshall (Scholastic)

A Castle on Viola Street by DyAnne DiSalvo (Harper Collins)

Sailing Home told by Gloria Rand, illustrated by Ted Rand (North-South)

Notable Books for Children Ages 10 and Up

Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio by Tony Johnston, illustrated by Raul Colon (Scholastic)

Q is for Quark: A Science Alphabet Book by David M. Schwartz, illustrated by Kim Doner (Tricycle)

Troy: A Novel by Adele Geras (Harcourt)

Bad Boy: A Memoir by Walter Dean Myers (Harper Collins)

Girlhearts by Norma Fox Mazer (Harper Collins)

Planet Zoo: One Hundred Animals We Can't Afford to Lose by Simon Barnes, illustrated by Alan Marks (Trafalgar Square)

Raven of the Waves by Michael Cadnum (Scholastic)

Benno's Bear by N.F. Zucker (Dutton)

Breaking Through by Francisco Jimenez (Houghton Mifflin)

Just Ask Iris by Lucy Frank (Atheneum)

The Circus in the Woods by Bill Littlefield (Houghton Mifflin)

Hidden Worlds: Looking Through a Scientist's Microscope by Stephen Kramer, photographs by Dennis Kunkel (Houghton Mifflin)

Fair Weather by Richard Peck (Penguin Putnam)

We Need to Go to School: Voices of the Rugmark Children compiled by Tanya Roberts-Davies (Douglas and McIntyre)

A Hole in the World by Sid Hite (Scholastic)

Appendix B: Teacher Observation Form

Teacher: _____ Observer: _____

Teacher's Initials: _____ Date: _____ Lesson Observed: _____

Time of Observation: _____ Date of Conference: _____

Use the following list of indicators of good teaching to help identify specific areas of strength and weakness.

Areas of Strength:

Areas of Weakness:

Conference Notes:

Indicators

I. Instructional Practices

- Communicates objective of the lesson prior to beginning
- Raises interest in the lesson
- Relates new learning to previous learning
- Combines auditory explanation with:
  - ▹ visual references
  - ▹ student participation
- Provides structured practice
  - ▹ teacher-directed activity
  - ▹ all students participate
- Utilizes questioning techniques
  - ▹ frames questions
  - ▹ builds on responses
  - ▹ encourages relevant discussion
  - ▹ utilizes "wait time"
  - ▹ checks for individual understanding
- Evaluates student learning:
  - ▹ group or individual questioning and answering
  - ▹ class debate or discussion
  - ▹ quiz/test
  - ▹ students working at board
  - ▹ written assignment
  - ▹ class project/lab
  - ▹ uses the evaluation process to reteach the objective as necessary
- Provides closure to the lesson
  - ▹ relates lesson to the objective
  - ▹ allows for student involvement
  - ▹ checks the understanding of students

II. Classroom Management

- Establishes high expectations for:
  - ▹ appropriate behavior
  - ▹ student readiness (equipment/materials)
  - ▹ class routines
  - ▹ promptness
- Uses class time for learning
  - ▹ begins instruction promptly
  - ▹ minimizes non-instructional activities
- Provides for smooth, rapid, and clearly defined instructional transitions
- Room arrangement is conducive to movement of teachers and students
- Uses positive reinforcement

III. Knowledge of Subject Matter

- Demonstrates knowledge of subject matter that is:
  - ▹ relevant
  - ▹ current
- Selects appropriate materials

IV. Advance Preparation

- Demonstrates adequate advance preparation and organization of lesson procedures and materials
- Plans to involve all learners by:
  - ▹ providing a variety of activities for individuals and groups
  - ▹ providing alternatives for students with exceptional needs
  - ▹ accomodating a variety of learning styles
  - ▹ adjusting instruction based on the monitoring of the lesson
- Selected at the appropriate level of difficulty and complexity:
  - ▹ daily lesson objectives
  - ▹ questioning techniques
  - ▹ test times
  - ▹ higher and lower order thinking skills
  - ▹ resources

V. Classroom Environment

- Shows tact, concern, and sense of humor
- Conveys high expectations and the belief that all students can learn
- Demonstrates enthusiasm for learning
- Establishes good rapport with students
- Uses incentives to promote and reward success
- Respects students' opinions and feelings
- Maintains a well-organized, attractive environment relative to the curriculum

Appendix C: Evaluating Your Reading Program

Use this questionnaire to evaluate and improve your reading program. Write 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 beside each question to indicate your response.

Key: 0=Never 1=Seldom 2=Sometimes 3=Frequently 4=Always

____ Children learn from modeling (shared reading, echo reading, reading aloud, etc.).

____ Children enjoy reading and are motivated to read.

____ Learning to read is easy and fun.

____ Students spend time practicing reading.

____ The school environment is literacy-rich.

____ Parents are actively involved.

____ Students are challenged with high-level materials.

____ The reading program emphasizes a "balanced" approach to literacy instruction.

____ Children write extensively about what they read and experience.

____ A variety of decoding strategies are taught (phonics, context clues, structural analysis).

____ Direct instruction in systematic phonics is taught when necessary.

____ The reading environment is varied and includes different "settings" for reading.

____ Teachers know and apply a variety of reading methods.

____ The importance of active learning is discussed, and strategies are taught to staff at workshops.

____ Alternative assessment strategies are used and evaluated throughout the year (observation, running records, etc.).

____ Textbooks or reading series, if used, are evaluated for: quality of material, comprehension instruction, vocabulary, decoding, and reading/writing connection.

____ Students' interests are evaluated and reading materials are provided based on those interests, to the greatest degree possible.

____ Progress is frequently monitored using both formal and informal assessment techniques and is used to inform instruction.

Source: Marie Carbo. 1997. "Reading Program Evaluation Questionnaire," in *What Every Principal Should Know About Teaching Reading.* Syosset, NY: National Reading Styles Institute, pp. 178-184.

Appendix D: Handouts for Parents

Ten Tips for Parents: Raising Good Readers

1. **Talk, sing, and play with your child.**

- Sing, chant, and play with common rhythms and rhymes to help him/her begin to hear the similarities and differences in spoken words.
- Listen carefully as your child talks to you. Answer his/her questions, take time to explain your reasoning, and encourage him/her to ask questions.
- During meal times, bus or car trips, or while sitting in waiting rooms, talk about enjoyable past events or comment on your surroundings.

2. **Read aloud to your child each day.**

- Read stories and information books to your child.
- Bring books with you while you're waiting at the doctor's office or running errands.

3. **Surround your child with reading materials.**

- Create a bookshelf for your child that is easy for him/her to reach.
- Place books in baskets in various places around your home, near your child's bed, by the TV area, and even in the kitchen.
- Pack some books for the train, bus, or car when you go on trips with your child.
- Subscribe to magazines in your child's name.

4. **Read different types of books.**

- Be sure you and your child have a library card. Start the library "habit" early by visiting on a regular basis. You'll find more than just books at the library; there are also regular storytimes, puppet shows, and "talking" computer books.

5. **Read at a leisurely pace.**

- Sit closely so your child can see the book and help you turn the pages.
- Touch the printed words as you read and point to the pictures.
- Pause now and then to give your child time to mull over the ideas and ask questions.
- Pose a question that encourages him/her to think, and relate the events of the story to his/her own personal experiences.

6. **Read it again and again.**

- Encourage chiming or reading together favorite lines.
- Find ways to bring your child's favorite character to life in daily activities ("What do you think Clifford would do if he were here now?")

7. Have reading and writing everywhere.

- Praise your child's attempt to read.
- Play games such as "I see a fruit that begins with b."
- Point to familiar signs with letters that are common in your child's name.
- Give him/her lots of opportunities to play with print and letters–magnetic letters for the refrigerator, TV schedules, menus.
- Write a note and put it in your child's lunchbox.

8. Help your child learn about letters and sounds.

- Sing the alphabet song, read alphabet books, and play with alphabet puzzles and blocks.
- Show him/her how you write his/her name and some of his/her favorite words. Say the sounds slowly as you write.
- Encourage your child to write.
- Create a small writing area and stock it with paper, crayons, stickers, and other writing tools. A small bulletin board can be used to send messages; a post office box made from a shoe box will encourage your child to write.

9. Limit and monitor television.

- Review the TV guide with your child and select shows for the week.
- Try renting videos from the library, which offer a wide selection of good titles.
- Watch with your child and talk about favorite programs.
- Put your television in a place where you can monitor what your child watches.

10. Be your child's best advocate in school.

- Ask your child's teacher, "What are your goals for reading and writing? How will you help my child reach these goals? What can I do to support them?"
- Look for evidence of print in the classroom—posters, pictures with captions, calendars, signs, directions, and labels on boxes with supplies.
- Look for attractive displays of books in the classroom to spark children's enthusiasm for reading.
- See if there are opportunities for children to hear stories read aloud in big groups, small groups, and one-on-one.

Source: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). 1998. *Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children: Ten Research-Based Principles.* Online: www.ciera.org/library/libresources/principles/index.html

How Can I Help My Child Learn to Read?

Suggestions for Parents

As parents, you play an important role in your child's literacy development. There are many simple activities you can do with your child at home to promote his/her literacy development and instill a life-long love of reading.

1. Read to your child.
2. Provide a quiet place where your child can work and read.
3. Talk to your child about items of interest you have seen in the newspaper or in magazines.
4. Label items. Post signs, words, and notes for your child to read.
5. Permit your child to read the grocery list and locate items in the store.
6. Play reading-related games such as letter or word bingo, concentration with letters or words, and Scrabble.
7. Arrange mixed-up sentences to make a story.
8. Help your child write stories or books.
9. Read poetry to your child and assist your child in memorizing it.
10. Encourage your child to find and circle known words in the newspaper.
11. Allow your child to help prepare a dish for dinner by reading and following a recipe.
12. Place children's books and magazines around the house.
13. Place a limit on the amount of time your child may spend watching TV.
14. Use puppets for storytelling.
15. Be sure to help your child select books he/she can read. These should be easy enough that your child knows 99 percent of the words without your help.

Source: Sharon J. Crawley and King Merritt. 1996. *Remediating Reading Difficulties.* Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Easy Learning Activities to Do at Home

Parents are teachers, too!

Every day the things families do with their children are helping them to learn about the world around them. Many of these things also help them to be more successful in school. Just as important, what you do at home can help your child realize that learning can be fun.

Our busy lives sometimes make it difficult to set aside time every day for reading with our children. So below, we list suggestions for everyday activities that are great learning experiences for your child—and many are already part of your daily life together.

Just Talk!

We all learn about words by hearing them before we ever learn to read. Although your child is already learning to read, the words and sentences will be very simple at first—much simpler than the way people talk. When you talk together, you will be helping your son or daughter to be prepared to read more difficult books.

Tell stories—about your family, your life when you were young, what you did that day. Since your child is learning that many stories have a beginning, middle, and an end, sometimes use a phrase like: "The first thing that happened was."

If you aren't comfortable talking in English, don't worry. The most important thing is for your child to hear language—lots of it—and children are much better than adults at switching back and forth between languages.

Encourage your child to ask you questions while you are talking. Learning how to ask questions will give him or her an important skill that will help both inside and outside school.

Ask your child questions that need more than a yes or no answer. This gives him or her a chance to organize thoughts and then to explain them to you. This will provide more good practice for school activities.

Take advantage of chores you do every day to talk with your child. As an example, talk about your grocery list while you are making it or while you are on the way to the store. Then point out words on labels and signs as you walk though the store.

Encourage Writing!

People used to think that children couldn't really write because they didn't know how to spell many words. Now we know that writing—simple sentences, short stories, and poems—helps kids with their reading even though they need to "invent" some of the spelling. Just as important, they *like* to write!

Have paper and pencils out for your child to use. And crayons—because the first "stories" children write are often combinations of pictures and words. Encourage your child to write short stories, write letters to relatives, or draw a picture of something you have done together as a family—and then write a sentence underneath it.

Spelling correctly will come later. What's important now is your child's first attempts to put ideas down on paper—and you can encourage your child to keep on writing by showing your pleasure.

Show your child that you are a writer, too. Write notes to leave in his or her lunchbox. Or create a treasure hunt using simple clues. Or write stories about "When You Were Small." Any of these show your child what it means to be a writer and also gives him or her more opportunities to read.

Use the TV to Help Your Child's Learning!

Sometimes the best thing that you can do is to turn the TV *off*. Children should be encouraged to spend time reading, playing, and talking—not just sitting.

But there are some good TV programs for children—and these can provide even more learning for your children if you watch *with* them and then talk together about what you have seen and heard.

After watching, ask your child questions. This way, you will be sure that he or she understands—and you will also encourage *active* learning. This is good practice for school—children should be *thinking* about what they hear while they are listening to the words.

Even looking at the TV schedule together can be an opportunity for learning. With your help, your child can *read* the schedule, *make choices* about what to watch, and *plan* how to finish chores and homework before the program starts. These are all terrific skills that he or she will be able to use at both school *and* home.

Be a Reader Yourself!

Think about it—your child looks up to you and wants to be like you. If you spend time reading and show that you enjoy it, your child will be more likely to read, too.

When you are reading a story in the newspaper or a magazine that you think your child would like, share it! When you use a cookbook, talk about the steps in the recipe as you cook. When you get a letter from a friend or relative, read it out loud.

Use every opportunity to show how reading helps you—and get your child involved with it. While these activities don't need to take much time, they provide good lessons.

How Parents of Older Students Can Promote Literacy Development

Parental involvement should not be limited to the early grades; older students, too, benefit greatly from the support and assistance adults can provide. The following are suggestions for parents of upper elementary and middle school students:

- Let your child see you reading. When children see their parents reading for pleasure, they are more likely to engage in reading activities themselves.

- Ask your children what they are learning about in school. Engage them in conversations on these topics based upon their readings. Children often enjoy discussing what they have read and may be motivated to read if they know someone is interested in discussing the reading with them.

- Provide your child with a variety of reading materials. Subscribe to a magazine in his/her name, encourage him/her to read the newspaper, or give your child copies of your favorite books from when you were your child's age.

Appendix E: Glossary of Terms Related to Reading Instruction

Active learning – Learning experiences in which students are actively "engaged" in learning through "making connections" with prior knowledge or through physical activities such as touching, acting, walking, drawing, sorting, etc.

Alphabetic principle – The understanding young children acquire when they realize that the letters of the alphabet are pieces of words and that these words have meaning.

Basal readers – A series of books, usually purchased by a school or district from a publisher, used in reading instruction and that incorporate progressively difficult text.

Big Books – Simple, oversized books that teachers use to read to students so that they can easily see the words and be encouraged to read along.

Comprehension – Refers to an individual's ability to understand, make inferences, draw conclusions, and recall details from what he/she has read. Listening comprehension refers to spoken language, reading comprehension refers to written language.

Critical thinking – A skill that involves judging the accuracy, validity, and quality of ideas.

Decoding – Sounding out the parts of an unfamiliar word and then blending them together in order to identify it.

Direct instruction – A highly organized method of instruction, which includes the teacher explaining new information, demonstrating its use, guiding children while they practice the new skill, and then having them apply it independently. Some children may need direct instruction in, for example, phonics or phonemic awareness.

Emergent literacy – A range of activities and behaviors related to written language undertaken by very young children. These reading and writing related activities change over time and culminate in conventional literacy during middle childhood.

Emergent reader – A child beginning to associate the printed word with meaning; examples of emergent literacy activities include looking at a picture book, talking with a parent about a story, or "writing" a story using scribbling or invented spelling.

Environmental print – Words that children see in the world around them. For example, a sign for McDonald's or a stop sign.

Fluency – The ability to read words with accuracy and appropriate speed.

Fluent reader – A child who can independently read materials appropriate for his or her age.

Frustration level/reading – Level at which a child's reading skills break down—fluency diminishes, many errors in word recognition are made, comprehension becomes weak, and signs of frustration or discomfort become evident.

Guided reading – This is an instructional practice in which a teacher works with a small group of students who read on a similar level to read and talk about the text together. Students usually read the text orally and receive support from their teacher when difficulties are encountered.

High-frequency words – Words that appear often in books—for example: the, and, be, and are.

Integrated curriculum – Teaching subject areas, such as science, math, and language arts, as related parts of a whole.

Invented spelling – A student's attempt at spelling words based on the way they sound such as "skl" for school or "mne" for many. This system allows the child to actively think about the sounds that make up a word. Children who use invented spelling during independent writing activities are typically expected to correctly spell words that have already been taught but encouraged not to limit their writing to use of these words.

Leveled books – Books for which the reading level, or level of text difficulty, have been determined. Leveled books often can be bought in sets, with texts containing increasing complex sentence structures and vocabulary as the text level increases.

Literacy – This includes reading, writing, and the creative and analytical acts involved in producing, reading, and comprehending texts.

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Literature-based – A literature-based reading program primarily uses literature to teach reading. Emphasis is placed on high-quality stories, poems, and non-fiction.

Metacognition – A term used to describe what you are thinking about your own thinking. It often refers to an individual's awareness of the different processes he/she is using to understand and comprehend text as he/she is in the process of reading.

Phoneme – The smallest discernible unit of sound. There are 44 phonemes in the English language.

Phonemic awareness – The conscious understanding that words can be broken down into different sound "pieces"—for example, while the word "cat" it is all one sound, a child with phonemic awareness will recognize that the word is actually made up of a series of sounds, or phonemes, /k/, /a/, and /t/. Researchers now believe this is a critical step in learning to read. While some children develop this understanding simply by being read to or beginning to read themselves, others may need instruction to help them recognize that words can be segmented (broken apart into sounds) and that sounds can be "blended" into words.

Phonics – The aspect of a reading program that focuses on the relationships of the sounds of words to letters and combinations of letters. Some children learn to read without instruction in phonics, while others may benefit from instruction that helps them to grasp the connections between letters and sounds. An understanding of phonics can help early readers "decode" unfamiliar words, especially when these words are not used in a sentence that provides other types of clues.

Print awareness – A beginning reader's understanding of the characteristics of written language, for example, that lines of English print are read from left to right or that a book can be upside down.

Readiness – To be prepared for instruction by having the prerequisite skills and understandings.

Reading – The process in which information from the text and the knowledge possessed by the reader act together to produce meaning.

Reading problem – Low achievement in reading or some key component of reading.

Sight words – Simple, frequently used words that can be immediately recognized as a whole without first breaking them up, such as "the" and "dog."

Sustained silent reading (SSR) – Time set aside at school or at home for children to read without interruption.

Whole language – An instructional approach that emphasizes reading for meaning; the use of children's literature; the integration of the language arts (reading, speaking, and writing); the writing process; and the teaching of skills in the context of real reading tasks.

Word attack – An aspect of reading instruction that includes intentional strategies for learning to decode, sight read, and recognize written words.

Word recognition – The fluent and automatic sounding out of words. Rapid word recognition is essential for fluent reading and adequate comprehension.

Leading Learning Commmunities NAESP Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do

Standard One: Balance Management and Leadership Roles

Standard Two: Set High Expectation and Standards

Standard Three: Demand Content and Instruction That Ensure Student Achievement

Standard Four: Create a Culture of Adult Learning

Standard Five: Use Multiple Sources of Data as Diagnostic Tools

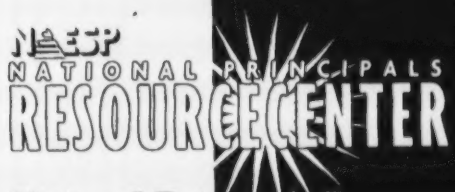
Standard Six: Actively Engage the Community

NAESP is committed to providing elementary and middle level principals with the resources they need to meet the ever-increasing challenges of their position. Toward that end, we are attempting to connect our publications and activities to the standards identified in our landmark publication, *Leading Learning Communities*: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do.

This book, *What Principals Need to Know About Teaching...Reading*, relates directly to Standard Three in our Leading Learning Communities publication. We all know the importance of reading as a fundamental skill for students. It is our hope that this book will provide you with information you need about teaching reading and support you in your efforts to provide leadership in this area for your learning community.

Vincent L. Ferrandino
Executive Director
NAESP

National Association of Elementary School Principals. 2001 "Leading Learning Communities, NAESP Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do" www.naesp.org



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